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# W **SMACKDOWN!**

SMACKDOWN! MAGAZINE

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OF**

## **REY MYSTERIO**

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# LETTERS

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## Straight Up Cena

Dear Editor,

First of all, I would like to offer congratulations on your first *SmackDown! Magazine*, and I hope it will be a huge success. Second, I think you picked the top Superstar to be on the cover, "The Doctor of Thuganomics" himself, John Cena. John is the second-best wrestler on the *SmackDown!* roster (Rhyno is No. 1). He is a great entertainer and an even better athlete—plus, he raps better than Eminem.

Tyson Farrish  
Via e-mail

Dear Editor,

I'm thrilled that John Cena is on the cover of not just any issue of *SmackDown! Magazine*, but the first. I really think that Cena will be the next Hulk Hogan, Stone Cold or Goldberg. I must say that he was an excellent choice for the cover.

Philip Pirtle  
Tampa, FL

Dear Editor,

Yo, I thought the story on John Cena was off the hook. I had no idea that Cena will have a CD coming out soon. His CD is going to be tight, no doubt. And, you know for sure that John Cena's CD will go double-platinum, ya heard? I can't wait until ya return to St. Louis, because John Cena and I need to battle. Word Life!

Robert Higgins  
St. Louis, Mo

[Editor's Note: I feel you, dawg.]

## Macho Madness Continues

Dear Editor,

I really enjoyed the Randy Savage article in the first issue of *SmackDown! Magazine*. I hope that you follow up on this article. Maybe some day you could do an entire magazine on the icons of the business. This fan would like that.

Ron Freeland  
Via e-mail

[Editor's Note: Well, Ron, we're one step ahead of you. Look no further than our newest special magazine, The Greatest 50 WWE Superstars of All Time, on newsstands now!]

Dear Editor,

I just finished reading "The Noble Savage" article by Brian Solomon in the holiday issue of *SmackDown! Magazine*, and I must say that I was thoroughly impressed with it. I am a longtime fan of "Macho Man" Randy Savage and an even bigger fan of "Macho King" Randy Savage, which was covered with great photos inside the magazine. Kudos to Solomon on a job well done and I hope you guys continue with the "Legends" section.

Kevin Tracy  
Via e-mail

[Editor's Note: The "Legends" department will indeed continue to be a part of this magazine. Check out page 58 this month for a story on the one and only, Greg "The Hammer" Valentine.]

## Way to Go, Tazz

Dear Editor,

I am so glad someone heard Tazz. I got *SmackDown! Magazine* and I love it. I must agree with his "Tales from the Hook" column from the first issue—we need more Tazz. How about Tazz on the cover? If he wants, he can have Michael Cole on the cover with him.

Matt K.  
Irving, TX

[Editor's Note: Interesting idea, but we're pretty sure Tazz would go solo!]

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Volume 23 - No. 2

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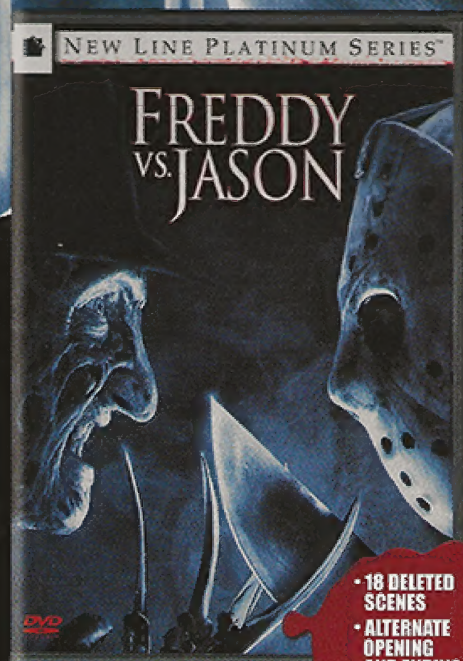
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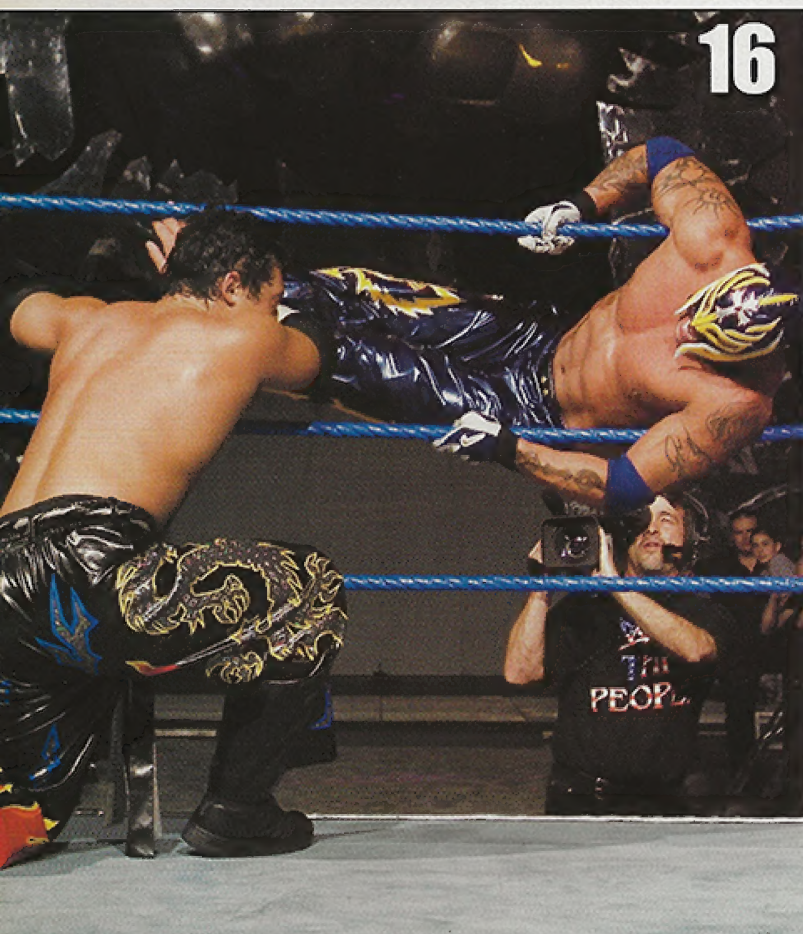
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## Features

### 16 Man of a Thousand Masks

Who's that jumpin' out the sky? It's Rey Mysterio, SmackDown!'s masked marvel. Read what he had to say about his heritage, the lucha libre tradition, and most importantly, his unique face gear.

### 22 No Love Lost

Sports-entertainment is all about animosity, and there certainly is no shortage of bad blood among the SmackDown! Superstars. We speculate who really hates who the most, and why.

### 30 Dazzling Dawn

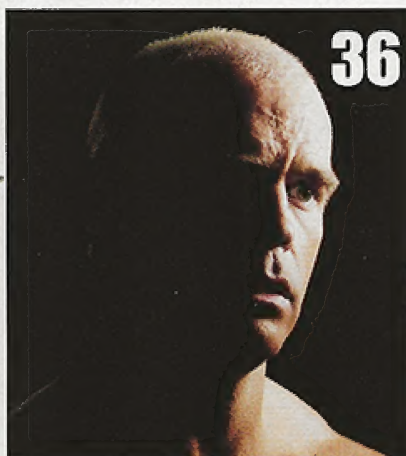
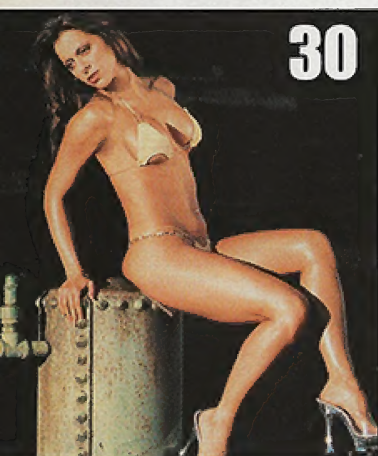
Check out this brand-new, sizzling Dawn Marie pictorial—featuring never-before-published pix! This one will make you wish you could be reincarnated as a bikini.

### 36 Hardcore Hatred

After a year on the shelf, Hardcore Holly is back in action, and by the looks of things, he hasn't lost a step. If anything, this 10-year veteran is stronger than ever. Learn what fuels his rage.

### 46 Indomitable Spirit

Darren "Droz" Drozdov was never one to allow life's adversities to stand in his way, and he's not about to change that policy, despite the disability he has struggled with since his 1999 injury.



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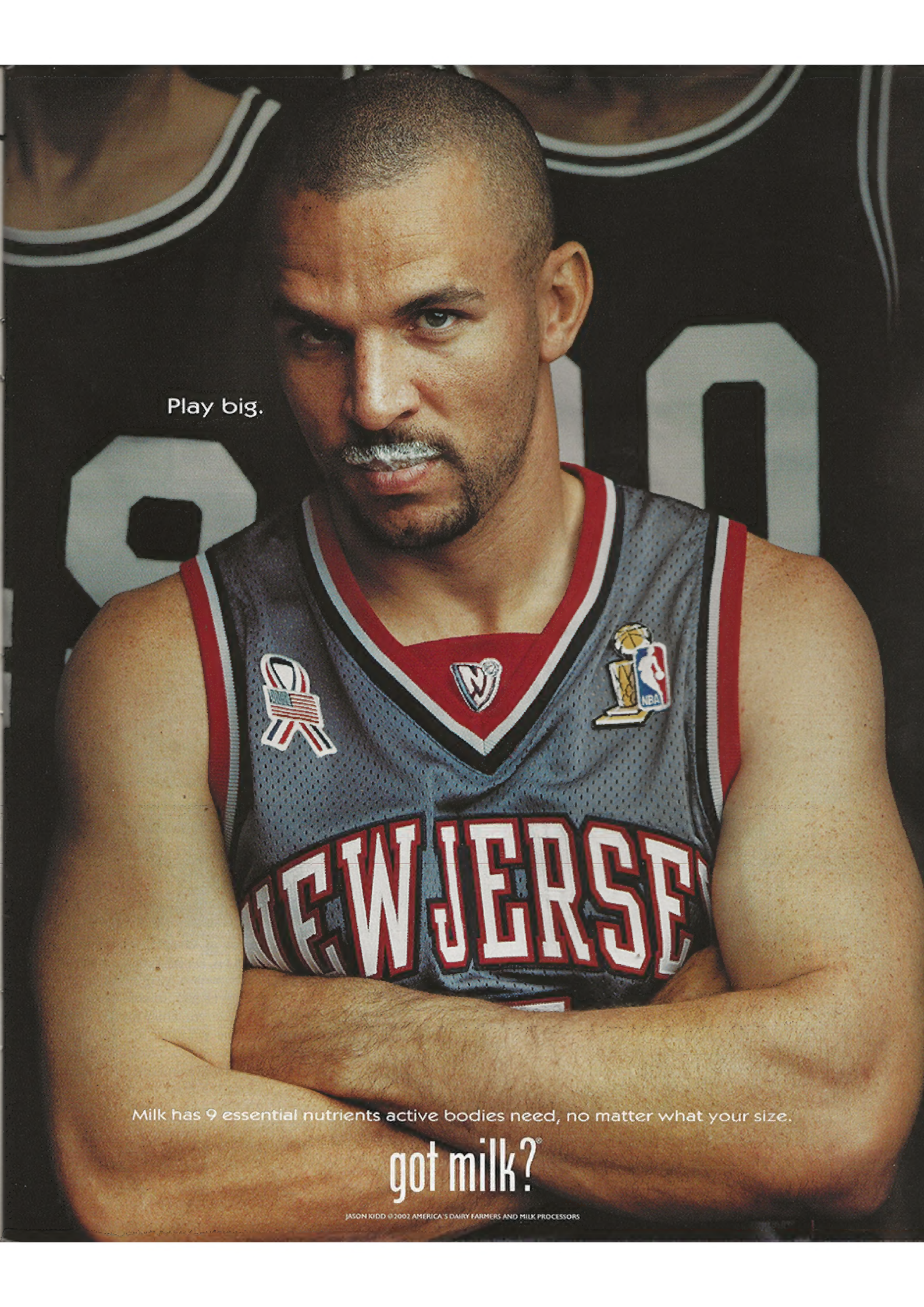
Legends: Greg "The Hammer" Valentine

Trivia

Tales from the Hook with Tazz

Cover photo: John Giamundo



A close-up portrait of basketball player Jason Kidd. He is wearing a grey New Jersey Nets jersey with red and white trim. The jersey features a USA Olympic patch on the left chest, a Nets logo on the right chest, and an NBA Finals patch on the right chest. He has a serious expression and is looking directly at the camera. His arms are crossed. The background is dark with large white numbers, likely from another jersey.

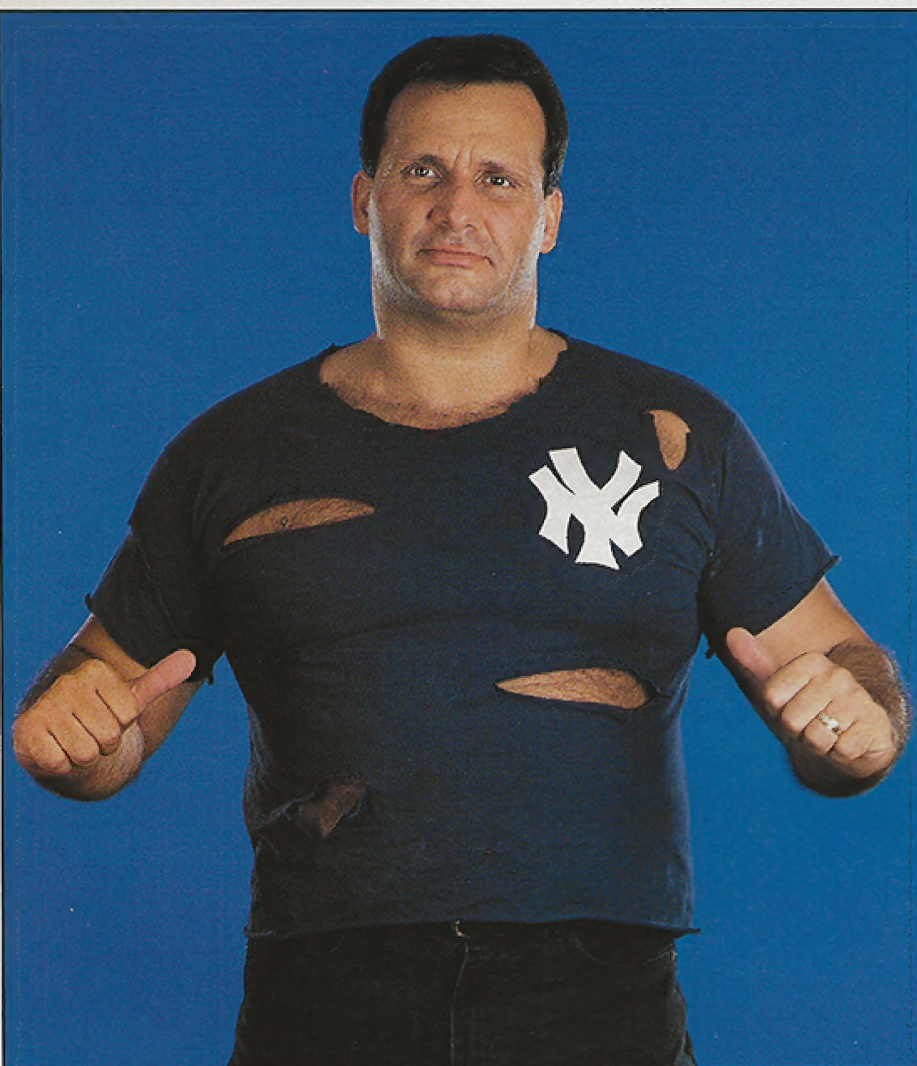
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## Steve Lombardi Sleeps With The Fishes

**W**WE Superstar Steve Lombardi, also known as the Brooklyn Brawler, was so confident that his favorite sports franchise, the New York Yankees, would win the 2003 World Series that he made a wager with Nunzio of the Full-Blooded Italians that the Yanks would take it in five games. Unfortunately for Lombardi, the Bronx Bombers fell short and were defeated by the underdog Florida Marlins in six, causing the grizzled veteran an estimated six figures worth of debt. Even with the help of his friend, Harvey Wippleman, Lombardi was unable to front the cash owed to the FBI. As of press time, Lombardi has been given 30 days to make good on his debt. Word has it that if his envelope is still light when this grace period expires, he may be swimming with the very same fish that got him in so much trouble in the first place. We'll have more on this story as it develops.

### A Case of Thuganomics

A close source has reported that Tazz is privately considering a lawsuit against rapper/*SmackDown!* Superstar John Cena regarding the use of his catchphrase "Basic Thuganomics." According to this source, Tazz believes that he was the first thug to make it big in WWE, and he believes that Cena is trying to capitalize on the popularity that he garnered by being a tough street thug from the Red Hook district of Brooklyn, New York. Tazz hasn't completely ruled out a return to the ring to resolve the matter himself, saying that if the legal system doesn't do its job, he will take care of the situation by any means necessary.



### Chavito Heat: "I Will Steal Mysterio's Mask"

The rumor going around the *SmackDown!* locker room is that Chavo Guerrero has grown tired of Rey Mysterio's enormous popularity and is looking to put a stop to it. The cruiserweight contender, known to his friends as Chavito, reminded his cronies that his *familia* lives by a simple creed, which involves lying, cheating and stealing above all else. To enforce the last part of the Guerrero family motto, Chavo claims that he will steal Rey Mysterio's mask, and in doing so, reveal his identity to the masses and humiliate him beyond belief. "Once the mask has been confiscated," Chavo brags, "it will hang from the mirror of my 1978 low rider as a reminder of my accomplishment."



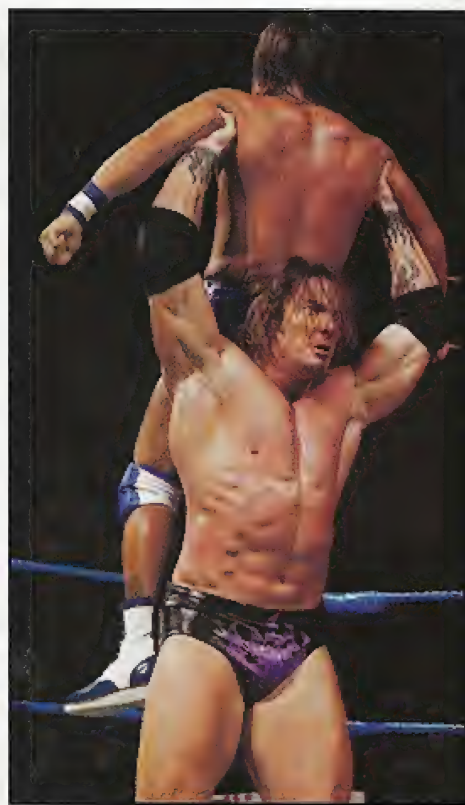
## Torrie Likes To Watch



**S**ome keen-eyed sports-entertainment insiders report that they have spotted none other than Torrie Wilson lurking in the rafters of several *SmackDown!* events, intently studying the action in the ring. Apparently, the former *Playboy* Playmate has been finding vantage points from which she can scrutinize the matches without distraction. Could Ms. Wilson be prepping for a serious run at in-ring competition? She certainly has the physical tools. With the right technique, she could become the most physically dominant of all *SmackDown!* Divas. Few have looked at her in that light before, yet Torrie was a top-notch fitness competitor in her pre-WWE days, much like Trish Stratus, who has achieved great success as an active competitor over on *Raw*.

## Sean O'Haire Looking For a New Mentor

The enigmatic Sean O'Haire is said to have been acting erratically over the last few months, following the departure of his onetime accomplice and mentor, "Rowdy" Roddy Piper. Apparently, O'Haire was having the time of his life learning the tricks of the trade from one of the craftiest competitors ever to grace a WWE ring. Nowadays, O'Haire has been said to be pursuing another devious mind from WWE's yesteryear, and if our sources are correct, this former manager of champions is actually considering coming out of retirement to lead the up-and-coming O'Haire to the promised land. If this partnership takes form, it could be just the thing O'Haire needs to become the top dog on *SmackDown!*



## SmackDown! Tour Guide

2/1: Pittsburgh, PA 1:30 pm	2/10: Tacoma, WA <i>SmackDown!</i> 7:30 pm	2/24: Kansas City, MO <i>SmackDown!</i> 7:30 pm
2/2: Toledo, OH 7:00 pm	2/15: San Francisco, CA <i>No Way Out</i> 4:45 pm	2/26: Capetown, South Africa 7:00 pm
2/3: Cleveland, OH <i>SmackDown!</i> 7:30 pm	2/16: Stockton, CA 7:00 pm	2/27: Durban, South Africa 7:30 pm
2/7: Regina, Saskatchewan 8:00 pm	2/17: Fresno, CA <i>SmackDown!</i> 7:30 pm	2/28: Johannesburg, South Africa 7:30 pm
2/8: Saskatoon, Saskatchewan 1:30 pm	2/22: Springfield, MO 2:00 pm	2/29: East Rand, South Africa 2:30 pm
2/9: Vancouver, British Columbia 7:00 pm	2/23: Joplin, MO 7:00 pm	

\*Schedule subject to change



## A Fine Line Between Genius and Insanity

**Vince McMahon is completely out of control—that much must be perfectly clear to any *SmackDown!* viewer.**

FOR FAR TOO LONG, THE SPECTER of Mr. McMahon has hovered over WWE, and ever since he's chosen *SmackDown!* as his personal playground, the entire franchise has been thrown off-kilter. In fact, he's been making the lives of *SmackDown!*'s Superstars a living hell. He has become *SmackDown!*'s problem, a cancer that threatens to destroy everything.

Let's take a look at the havoc he's wreaked in recent months. He's nearly ended the career of Kurt Angle, warped the mind of Brock Lesnar beyond repair, driven Hulk Hogan from the company, beat the crap out of his own daughter and charged people to watch it on television, buried Undertaker alive, humiliated and abused a one-legged man, and has all but committed adultery on national television with Sable. Need I go on?

Of course, the obvious question arises: Who's next on Mr. McMahon's "to-do" list of doom? Is anyone safe? After all, this is the man who calls the shots, so if he chooses to mess with you, there's not a whole you can do about it. In short, Vince McMahon is both the irresistible force and the immovable object, and dealing with him is just about the most dangerous endeavor a Superstar can engage in. Once he gets his mind set on something, he'll do anything in his

power to achieve that goal, and those who have attempted to strike back often find themselves up against a brick wall.

The chairman is a menace, plain and simple. Like an insane captain who must be relieved of duty to save his ship, he needs someone to put him in check. Unfortunately, however, this isn't some reckless employee we're talking about here. It's the majority owner of the company—in a nutshell, Mr. McMahon is World Wrestling Entertainment. In the world of sports-entertainment, there is no higher authority. So who has the power to stop the evil that is Vince McMahon?

Attempts in the past to put a president or commissioner in place were abject failures. Men like Jack Tunney, Sgt. Slaughter and Mick Foley tried their best to impose order, but in the end, they were puppets all. Because no matter how much they may have tried to change things, they couldn't escape one simple fact: they were still employees of Vince McMahon, the one person who required the most discipline.

These days, we have general managers, but their function is not so much imposing law and order as it is regulating competition, making matches and acquiring talent. Certainly, they can do something to check Vince's power, and have tried at times. But their ability to stand up to "The Man" is limited, at best. After all, precedent has shown that Mr. McMahon can step in at any time and overrule their decisions. We need someone who can overrule Mr. McMahon himself, and hold him to a code of conduct more becoming the



chairman of a major corporation.

Has he lost his mind? Surely an insane man could not plan his movements as accurately and with such cruel precision as Mr. McMahon. An insane man would not devise a game plan as clear as McMahon's, but would rather strike out irrationally. Then again, perhaps his actions are not as thought-out as they seem. Maybe the chairman has us all fooled into thinking he's a lot more devious than he really is. Are his actions those of a power-mad dictator, or simply a stark-raving lunatic? Whatever the reasoning, the damage he's done is undeniable.

Will someone step up to put the chairman in his place? It must be done soon, and it must be done decisively. In closing, I leave you with the words of the great teacher Yoda, who said:

"Do, or do not. There is no try." ■



# GILMAN'S CORNER



JOE'S ALL-YOU-CAN EAT

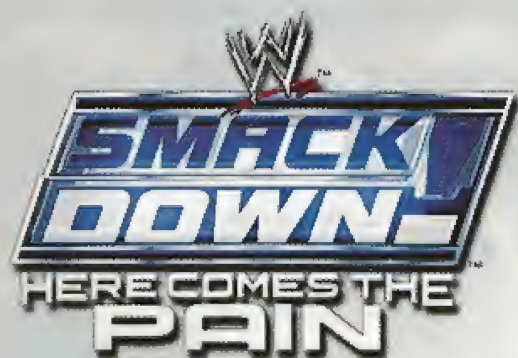


SEASON MODE, CHECK.

LEGENDS, CHECK.

ELIMINATION CHAMBER, CHECK.

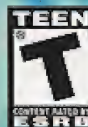
BRA & PANTY MATCH, HELL YEAH.



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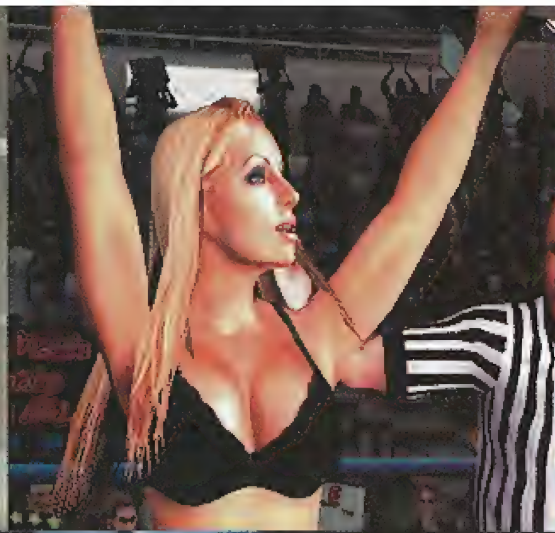


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# ASK THE SUPERSTARS

## Got a Question?

You, the readers, have the chance to pick the brains of the *SmackDown!* Superstars on any subject you like!

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### Eric Johnson asks:

## What sports did you play in school?

• **I played basketball** at Rutgers University. I was a power forward. They tried to get me to run track, but who wants to run? Basketball was enough running for me. I played it from seventh grade all the way up through college. — **Shaniqua**

• **Growing up in New Zealand**, we played cricket, and we played softball. I played a little soccer, but I played rugby for a good portion of my life. In rugby, I started in second row, which is lock, and then I went to blindside prop. Believe it or not, in my last seven games before I came to America, I was a winger. That's like a running back. — **Tony Garea**

• **In high school**, I played football and wrestled. Then, when I got to college, I concentrated on wrestling in the 177-to-190 pound weight class. In football, I was a wide receiver. — **Charlie Haas**

• **I played football** from the seventh grade on, and I wrestled from fifth grade on. I was captain of the wrestling team my senior year at Nanuet High School. In football, my junior year I started at halfback, and then linebacker. In my senior year, I was fullback and defensive end. I wrestled at 142, 155, 167 and 177, in different years. — **Nunzio**

• **Basketball was my big sport**, and I did amateur wrestling. Believe it or not, I was a power forward, even though I'm 5-foot-10. I wrestled at 178, but I usually wrestled up a weight class, like 184. — **Paul London**

• **I played Australian Rules football**. It's very similar to the NFL, but they don't wear pads. It's a bit faster. I played prop—that's like the front line. I was sort of a freak as a child, so I kept on hurting guys because they were a lot smaller than me. So I kind of lost my interest. Plus, the other parents were complaining. They wanted me to prove me age. I was the same age as everybody else, but when I was 10, I looked like I was about 14. — **Nathan Jones**

• **Did I play a sport in school?** I could've given you a real smart-ass remark. Actually, all I did was wrestle. I wrestled at 105, 112, 119, 138 and 142 in college. — **Eddie Guerrero**



• **Wrestling and football**. In football, I played middle linebacker, sometimes nose guard and fullback. In my freshman year of high school, I started at 152 pounds. My sophomore year I was 172, and my junior and senior year I wrestled at 189 and heavyweight. — **Brock Lesnar**

• **I wrestled at 189 pounds**, and later heavyweight. I played football, too, as a nose guard and tackle. But it didn't matter, I was f\*\*\*in' crazy, I could switch just like that, in the middle of the game. I also did a little tap dance and ballet. I was in theater, too, ya know, the XXX movies. But that was after school. Me and a couple of friends got together... — **Rhyno**

• **I played defensive end** in football, and I was a forward in basketball. — **Rikishi**

• **I played every sport**. This is what I played in my life: wrestling, basketball, football, baseball, soccer, bowling, ice skating, diving, swimming and pole-vaulting. In high school, I lettered in football and wrestling. My senior year, I wrestled at 126 pounds. — **Chavo Guerrero**

• **I played football, wrestling and basketball**. In football, I played safety. In basketball ... hell, I can't remember! Forget that question. — **Hardcore Holly**

• **I played football and track, in addition to wrestling**. I'm actually a junior college national champion in the 100 meters, 200 and 4 x 100. My position of choice in football was running back, but I was kind of one of those all-purpose guys. I wrestled heavyweight my entire career, even though I was outweighed by at least 75 pounds starting out. The heaviest I ever competed in a weight class of 275 was 217. — **Shelton Benjamin**





By Keith Elliot Greenberg

# THE MANY FACES

**R**ey Mysterio might hide his face, but he can't mask his soul.

Behind every blazing ring entrance, shimmering cape and rousing dive through the ropes is a sense of mission. As the nephew of Mexican legend Rey Mysterio, Sr., the human fireball views his spectacular WWE career as an opportunity to push his limits, showcase his culture and honor his family.

In the ring, he constantly challenges himself, battling through pain, and breaking through barriers. In his home, the sensation from San Diego reconnects to his heritage through the music that reverberates off the walls, the staccato language clattering about the kitchen and bedrooms, and the colorful masks he preserves with esteem and affection.

"I probably have close to 100 masks," he notes, "and every one of them means something to me."

There's the spider mask evoking thoughts of the mythic superheroes vaulting through the air in American comics and Mexican folklore; the white, black and silver covering that reminds Mysterio of the godly El Santo and celebrated Silver King of lucha libre days gone by; and the Daredevil-themed facade that, in many ways, mirrors Rey's image of himself.

"I wore it to *WrestleMania X-9*," he points out. "And I seemed to take on the qualities of the mask itself, throwing myself at my opponent and flying off the ropes as if I could actually go higher than any other human being. In some ways, it didn't feel like I was wearing a mask at all. Because when Rey Mysterio is in the ring, that's what I become."





# OF REY MYSTERIO

And if ever there was a time Rey needed to be a superhero, it's right now, as he prepares himself for another run at the Cruiserweight Championship, the title that originally put him on the map with American fans back in the WCW days. It seems he may be on a collision course with fellow Latino Superstar Chavo Guerrero that will culminate in February at *No Way Out*. Anyone that has followed his career this far knows he will be ready when the time comes.

It might sound dubious to say that Rey draws some of his strength from his masks, but that's actually not far from the truth. If not the actual mask itself, he certainly gains confidence from the tradition of the mask and what it represents.

Throughout the annals of the mat wars, many wrestlers have chosen to cover their features, from The Destroyer, to the Midnight Rider (a ruse Dusty Rhodes adopted after dropping a "loser-leaves-town" match), to El Olimpico, who was required to wear an open-faced disguise when the New York State Athletic Commission issued an edict prohibiting cloaked performers from appearing at Madison Square Garden. But below the border in Mexico, the mask takes on a more emotional meaning linked to the country's indigenous practices, Day of the Dead ceremonies, and eerily realistic Passion Plays.

"When I was growing up and visiting my relatives in Mexico, 80 percent of the wrestlers wore masks," recalls Mysterio. "I never knew what it meant. As I got older, I



understood that the mask made you another person. You transformed into something from a comic book, the same way Clark Kent turned into Superman."

Today, under his own variety of masks, Mysterio is perceived as a real-life action hero to Latinos, who constitute the largest-growing ethnic group in the United States. "If you look at the statistics, you'll see that *SmackDown!* is the No. 1 watched show among Hispanics," he says. "And for me, that means that I have an extra responsibility. I want to be a role model, not only because of what I do in the ring, but also for the way I conduct myself outside of it."

Mysterio developed this ethic on the California-Mexico border, where he attended classes at a San Diego high school during the day, and trained with—and wrestled alongside—his uncle.

While other Hispanic kids were trying to blend into American society, Rey was reconnecting to Mexico in all its

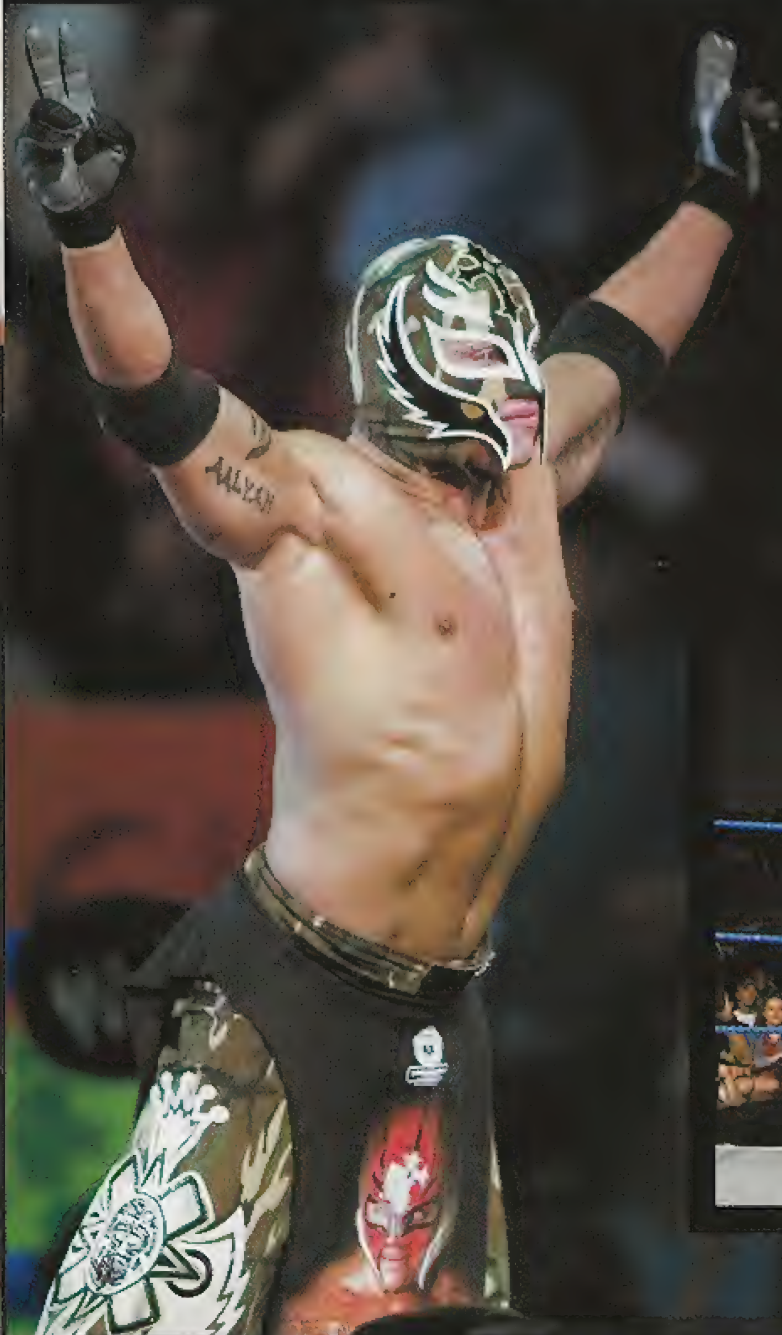
majestic wonder. Rey's parents had met in Tijuana, a rambling place populated largely by migrants from deep in the Mexican interior who'd come to the border town to work in the foreign-owned factories known as *maquiladores*. But their roots were in Guadalajara, a magical city where Rey eagerly journeyed at Christmastime.

"My grandfather lived on a street so narrow that only one car could pass at a time," Rey says. "If a car was coming from the opposite direction, it would have to back up. Pinatas would be strung from house to house. The ones for the kids would have candy and fruit inside, and be made with paper maché covering a pottery texture, so when you hit it, you had to really slam it. There were also adult pinatas, with eggs and flour inside, almost as a practical joke. When it opened up, the people didn't know what they'd be covered with."

At 15, Rey began wrestling in Tijuana. Two years later, he joined the AAA promotion, traveling to the most remote pockets of the country. In Tabasco and Merida Yucatan, the dialects were so influenced by local Indian languages that Mysterio found the Spanish indecipherable. In Veracruz, men came to the matches dressed completely in white, save for red scarves. In other places, fans wore traditional sombreros, and rode through traffic on horseback. "No matter what their background," Rey observes, "it would be a full house. They love their *lucha libre*. Along with soccer and music, that's their escape. They lose themselves in it, and it's for the whole family."

Eventually, Rey's in-ring inventiveness led him back to the United States, and a job with now-defunct WCW. On one hand, Mysterio's Mexican-seasoned moves were now accessible to mainstream America. But there was a price to pay. In an effort to modernize, WCW management naively requested that he remove his mask.

"I didn't want to do it," he says. "Fortunately, when I came to WWE, I was able to wear the mask again. It just felt more natural. I was back on my stage."

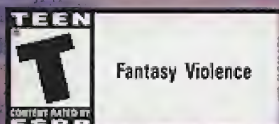




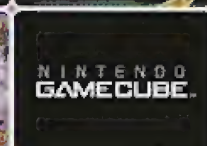
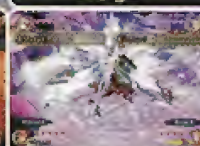
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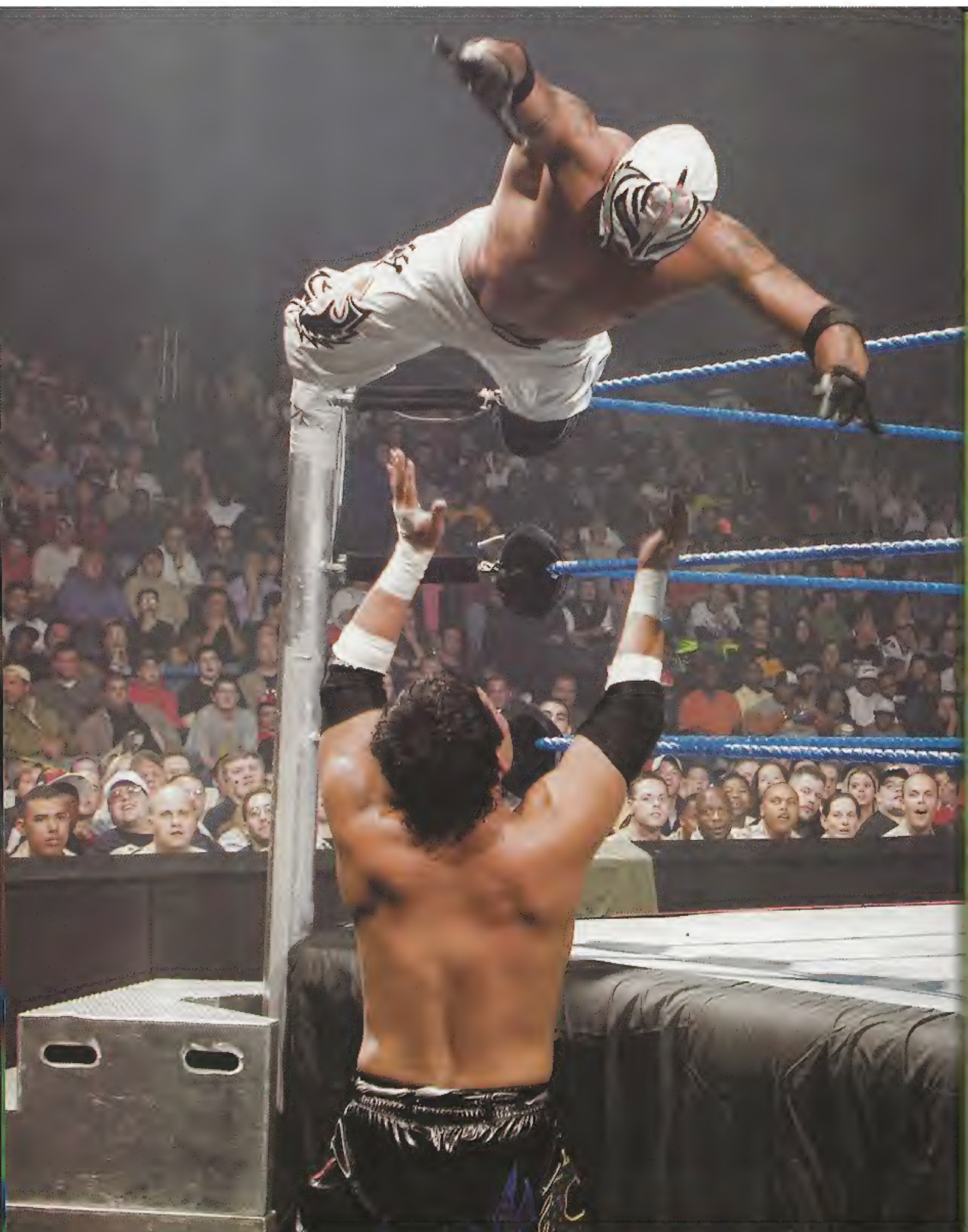


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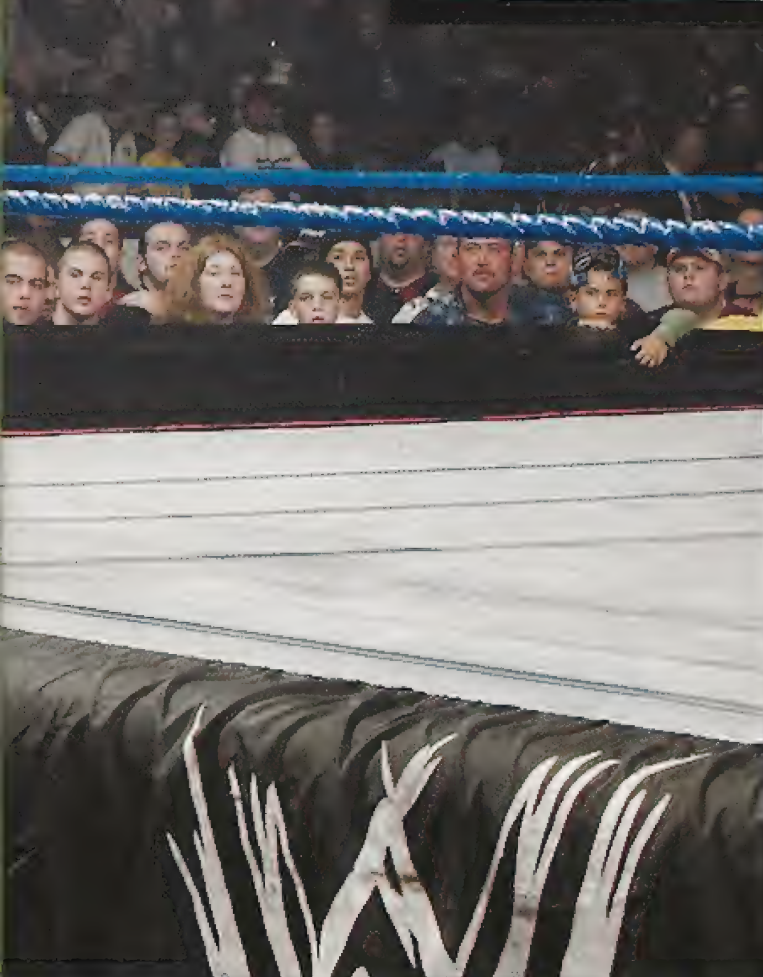


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He's used that stage to familiarize himself with other cultures and develop an appreciation of different Hispanic groups in the United States: "I love the way Puerto Ricans mix *arroz y habichuelas* (rice and beans), the sounds of *merengue* music from the Dominican Republic and *cumbia* from Colombia, and how Argentinians seem to combine Italian and Spanish when they speak. Because of my background, Hispanics are often looking to me for certain lessons, and I've done my best to live up to the expectations."

For example, even after five knee surgeries, Rey continues to overwhelm adversaries with his 619, West Coast Pop, planchas, and dives through the ropes. "No matter how much pain I've been through, I can't lower my standards in the ring," he says. "It's important for me to be creative in my matches, and for my fans to see that you should never quit—not only in wrestling, but in life."

A particularly moving moment for Rey was winning the WWE Cruiserweight title in front of his wife, Angie, and children, six-year-old Dominic and two-year-old Aalyah. "When you have the closest people in the world with you," he reflects, "it brings out your best."

Over time, he's begun to feel similarly about his fans. "Our connection is so strong, it sometimes feels like we're all in the same family," he says. "It's especially that way with Hispanic fans. When I see the way they react sometimes, it just opens my heart." ■



# PURE

# HAT

"Your hate has made you powerful."

-The Emperor

*Return of the Jedi*

## A Look at *SmackDown!*'s Hottest Rivalries



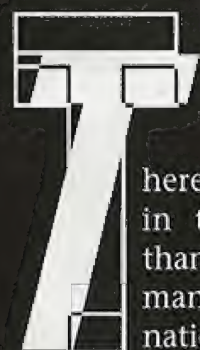
By Brian Solomon

# RED

"As love, if love be perfect, casts out fear, so hate, if hate be perfect, casts out fear."

—Alfred Lord Tennyson

*Idylls of the King*



here is no more powerful emotion in the spectrum of human feeling than hatred. It has shaped the fate of man and directed the course of great nations. It can possess the mind, directing one single-mindedly toward one objective: the destruction of the object of that hatred.

For whatever reason, no sport—perhaps no other area of human endeavor—has bred as much pure, unadulterated hatred as sports-entertainment. Ever since Frank Gotch hired Ad Santell to injure the leg of World Champion George Hackenschmidt back in 1908, the sport has been fueled by grudge matches. It seems almost as if these athletes are drawn to the sport as a means to work out their aggression and

prove the dominance of their own egos—which are often inflated enough to begin with.

When you get this many egomaniacs together, it's obvious that chaos is bound to ensue. Luckily for these hate-mongers, the ring is the perfect place to settle any grudge, the ultimate proving ground that has served to settle arguments for close to a century.

So who among the *SmackDown!* roster truly has hatred burning in their heart? And more importantly, who is it directed at, and why? Fans get the chance to see a lot of things played out on television, thanks to WWE's roving backstage cameras, but surely there's much more going on that we're not privy to. Speculation abounds as to what's really going on beneath the surface.



# TARGET: LESNAR



Heavy is the head that wears the crown—even if that head is perched atop a neck as powerful as that of Brock Lesnar, WWE Champion. The holder of the most coveted prize in the sport is always a magnet for jealousy, contempt and general treachery. In the case of Lesnar, he's brought much of it on himself.

Of course, Lesnar's most hard-fought grudge to date has been with Kurt Angle. The two former amateurs fought a war of pride that raged through much of 2003, and no one should assume that anything has been settled. Perhaps the two finest athletes in the sport, Lesnar and Angle are natural rivals, and the bitterness that has arisen from that rivalry has literally left bodies in its wake. In short, this is the kind of battle that shortens careers.

Of late, the champ has had his hands full with Hardcore Holly, the man he put on the disabled list with a broken neck last year. Now Holly is back, and not since the heyday of Stone Cold Steve Austin have fans seen a Superstar as determined to settle a score in the ring. As Holly himself discusses elsewhere in this issue ("How You Like Me Now!", page 36), this is not something that's going to go away until Lesnar has been made to feel a measure of the pain he's caused. Though it may run its course in the public arena, this is the kind of war that could re-erupt at a moment's notice.

— "It is better to be violent, if there is violence in our hearts, than to put on the cloak of nonviolence to cover impotence."

—Mahatma Gandhi

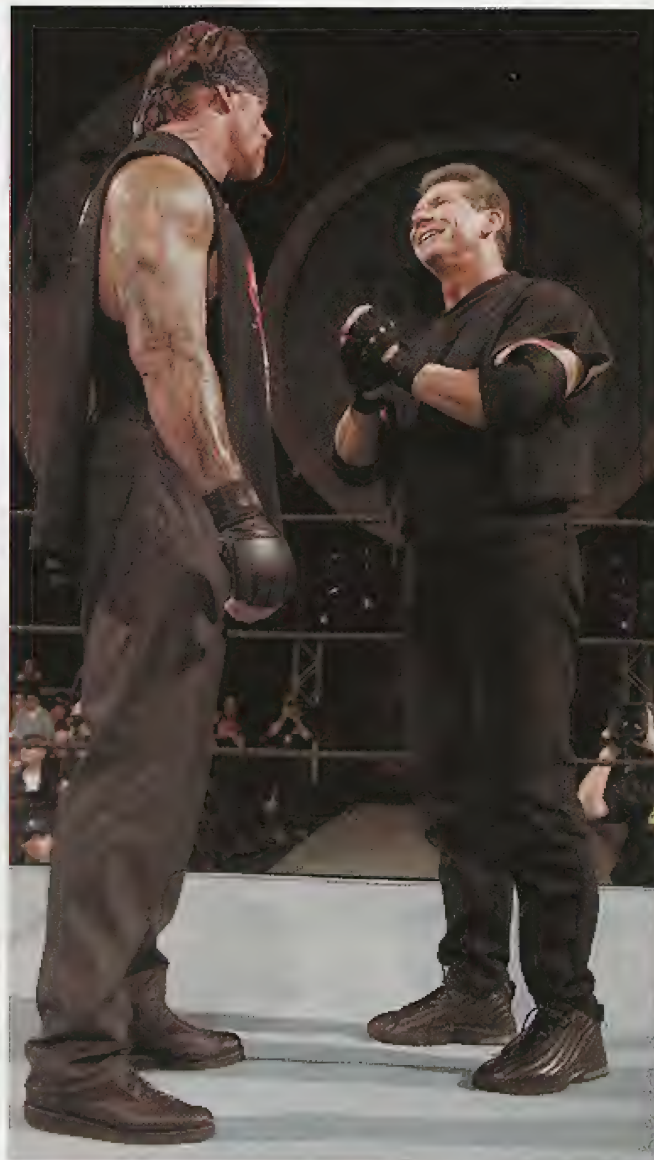
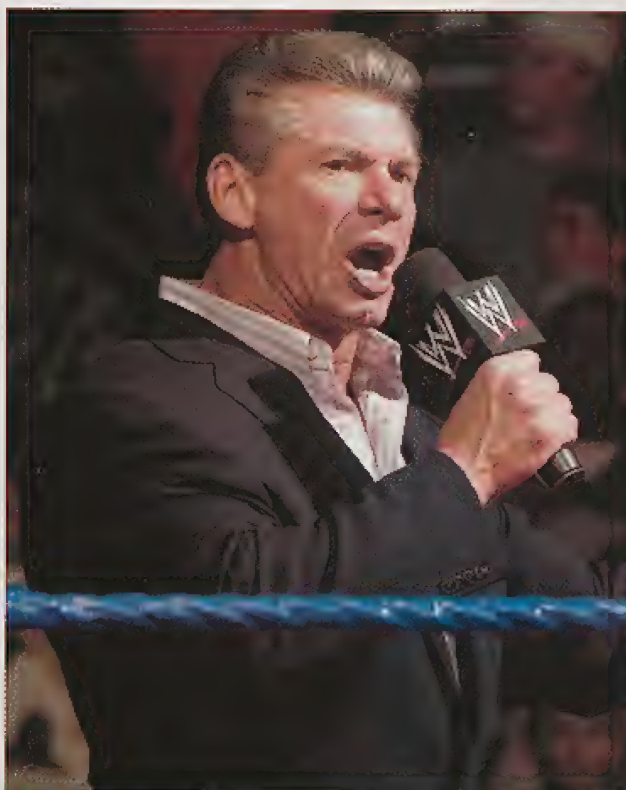


# DON'T CROSS THE BOSS

The Machiavellian machinations of Vince McMahon have been the plague of many a WWE Superstar for much of the past two decades, particularly since Mr. McMahon stepped from behind the announcers' table six years ago. With the Chairman spending most of his time on *SmackDown!* these days, it was predictable that he'd draw the ire of a multitude of Superstars immediately. And that has turned out to be the case.

His epic conflict with Undertaker, almost Shakespearean in its scope, has threatened to engulf the entire Thursday night franchise. It came to a head last fall, and the Deadman has not been seen since *Survivor Series*. Leading up to the Buried Alive Match at *Survivor Series*, fans witnessed a series of pre-taped interviews with Undertaker in which he laid out his beef with Mr. McMahon in specific terms. He made no bones about his desire to completely destroy the man. Likewise, the Chairman seemed like a man possessed as he marched forth on his quest to "slaughter the infidel," as he put it.

Somehow, Mr. McMahon has found time to piss off other *SmackDown!* Superstars in between gloating over his apparent elimination of Undertaker. Notable among these has been John Cena. Although Cena has not been as vocal about his animosity as others, it's hard to forget



the night that lit the initial spark. Overjoyed at his *Survivor Series* victory, McMahon made the mistake of accidentally using one of Cena's trademark catchphrases, referring to himself as "untouchable." While this may seem to be a trivial matter, Cena takes great pride in his lyrical creations, and will brook no imitators. Word is he has been stewing ever since the occurrence, just as the hate has been growing in McMahon when he thinks back on how the "Doctor of Thuganomics" humiliated him on national TV for his transgression.



# THE HEYMAN EFFECT

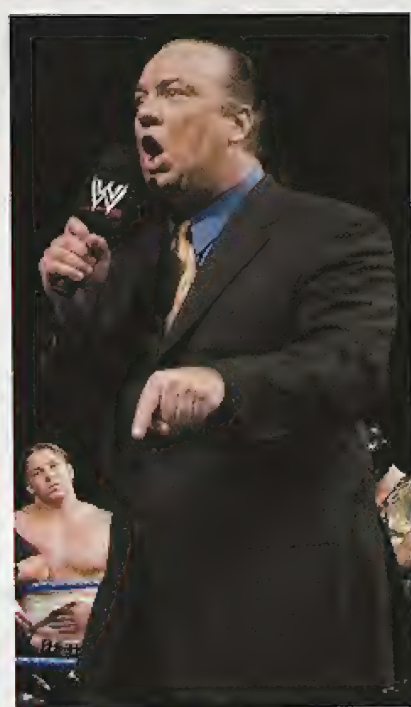
Paul Heyman seems to create controversy wherever he goes, and since taking over the General Manager reigns on *SmackDown!*, he has enjoyed his most powerful platform yet. From his position, Heyman can gleefully sow the seeds of hatred wherever he sees fit, and you can be certain that he's doing just that.

Just take a look at the man he introduced to the roster a few months ago: Matt Morgan. As massive and as mighty as he is, so is the rage that seethes within him. Heyman has been tapping into that since Day One. It seems as if Morgan has a general contempt for smaller people, which covers 99 percent of the human race.

In Morgan's case, there are some who trace Kurt Angle's recent injury setback—which returned him to the surgeon's scalpel

at the end last year—to his run-in with the Fairfield goliath last fall. During Morgan's first WWE appearance, he nearly powerbombed Angle through the mat, and the Olympian was reportedly never the same. Might he hold a grudge against Morgan? You do the math.

And what of Shannon Moore, who seems to have become Heyman's personal whipping boy? How long can Moore take being the target of the General Manager's abuse? After all, we're talking about someone who learned his model for life under the tutelage of Matt Hardy, the sensei of *Mattitude* himself. Moore is not one to be underestimated, and the fruits of his festering hatred for Heyman may one day be terrible to behold.



# CRUISERWEIGHT CARNAGE

Some of the most heated rivalries in sports-entertainment today—or in its history, for that matter—take place in the cruiserweight division. They may be smaller in size, but the loathing in their souls burns just as hot. The title itself is nearly as coveted as the Heavyweight crown, but that isn't always at the root of the situation.

Take Jamie Noble and Tajiri, for example. Although the championship has nothing to do with the war fought between these two cruiserweights, that takes nothing away from the mutual disgust they share. If anything, Tajiri took their battle to the next level by attacking Noble's girlfriend. When he blinded Nidia with his insidious green mist some months ago, he started something that is not yet finished. The bizarre relationship between Jamie and Nidia is nothing if not intense, and no short-term solution will satiate Noble's desire for revenge. Why

do you think Tajiri has recruited the help of countrymen Akio and Sakoda?

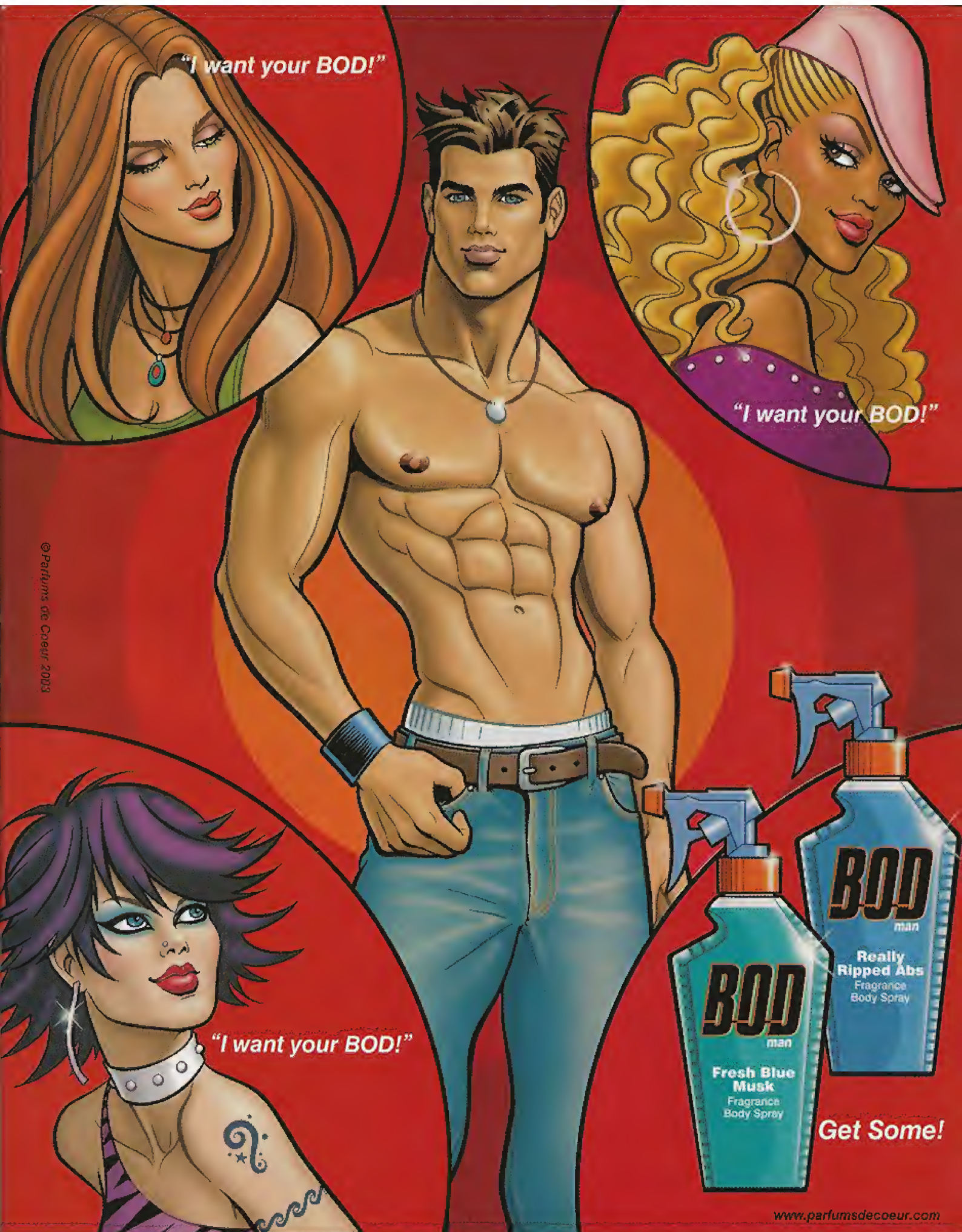
As for the title situation itself, it's clear to many insiders that a war is brewing involving the Guerreros and Rey Mysterio. Eddie & Chavo haven't been their usual well-oiled machine of late, so it's anyone's guess where this one may lead. There are a lot of X-factors involved, but tempers are already beginning to flare as Mysterio lobbies for a bout with Chavo.

From the looks of things, it doesn't appear that "Love Thy Neighbor" will be the mantra of *SmackDown!* any time soon. As it has since the heyday of the Peerless One and the Russian Lion a century ago, hatred continues to stoke the fires of the engine that drives the business.

Can't we all just get along? On *SmackDown!*, the answer is an emphatic "No!" ■







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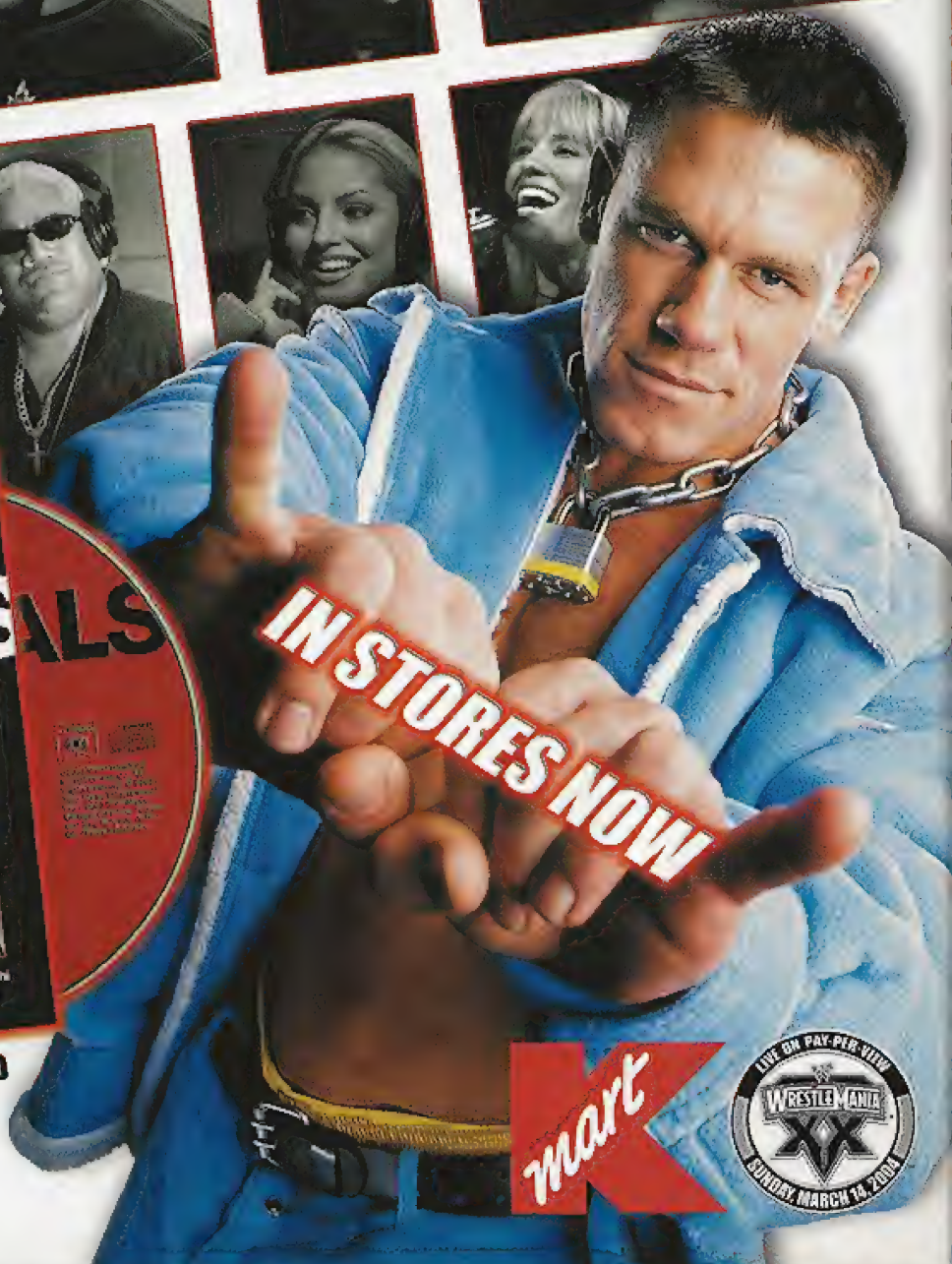
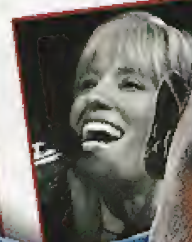
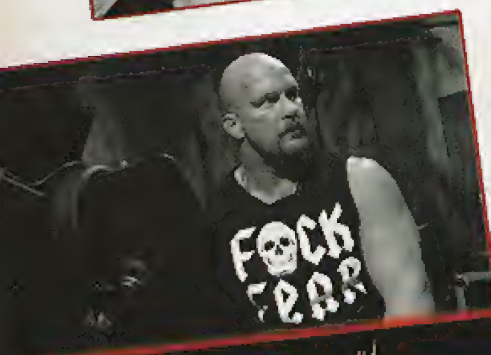
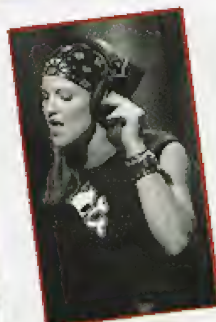
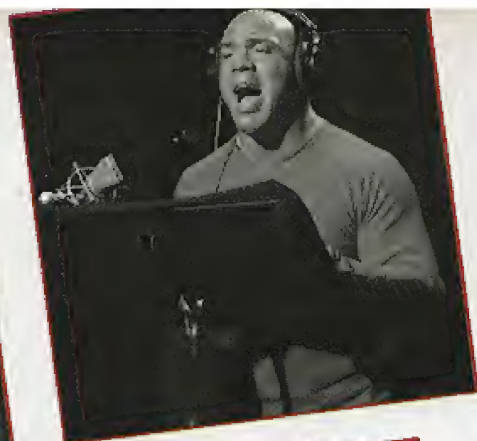
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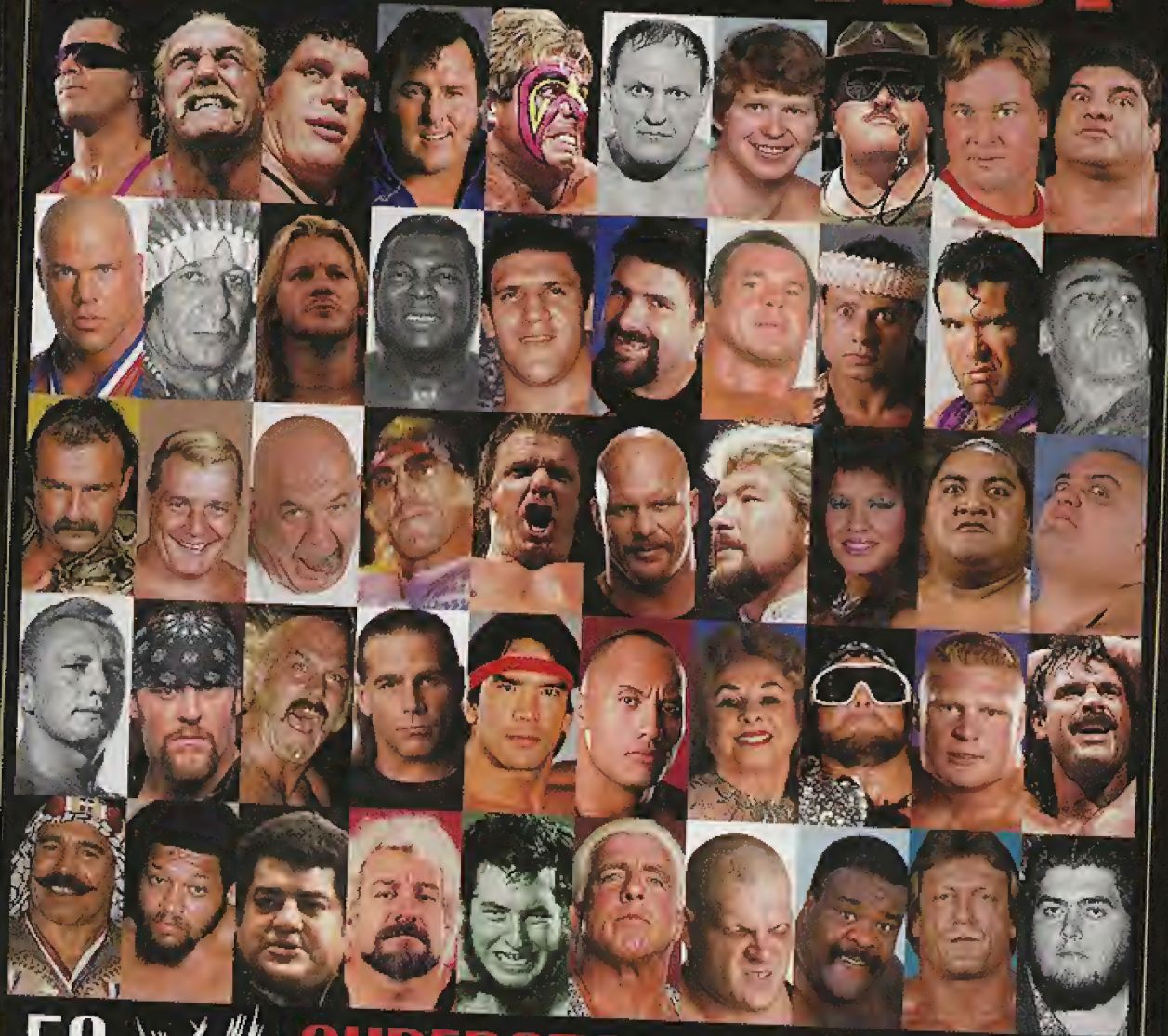




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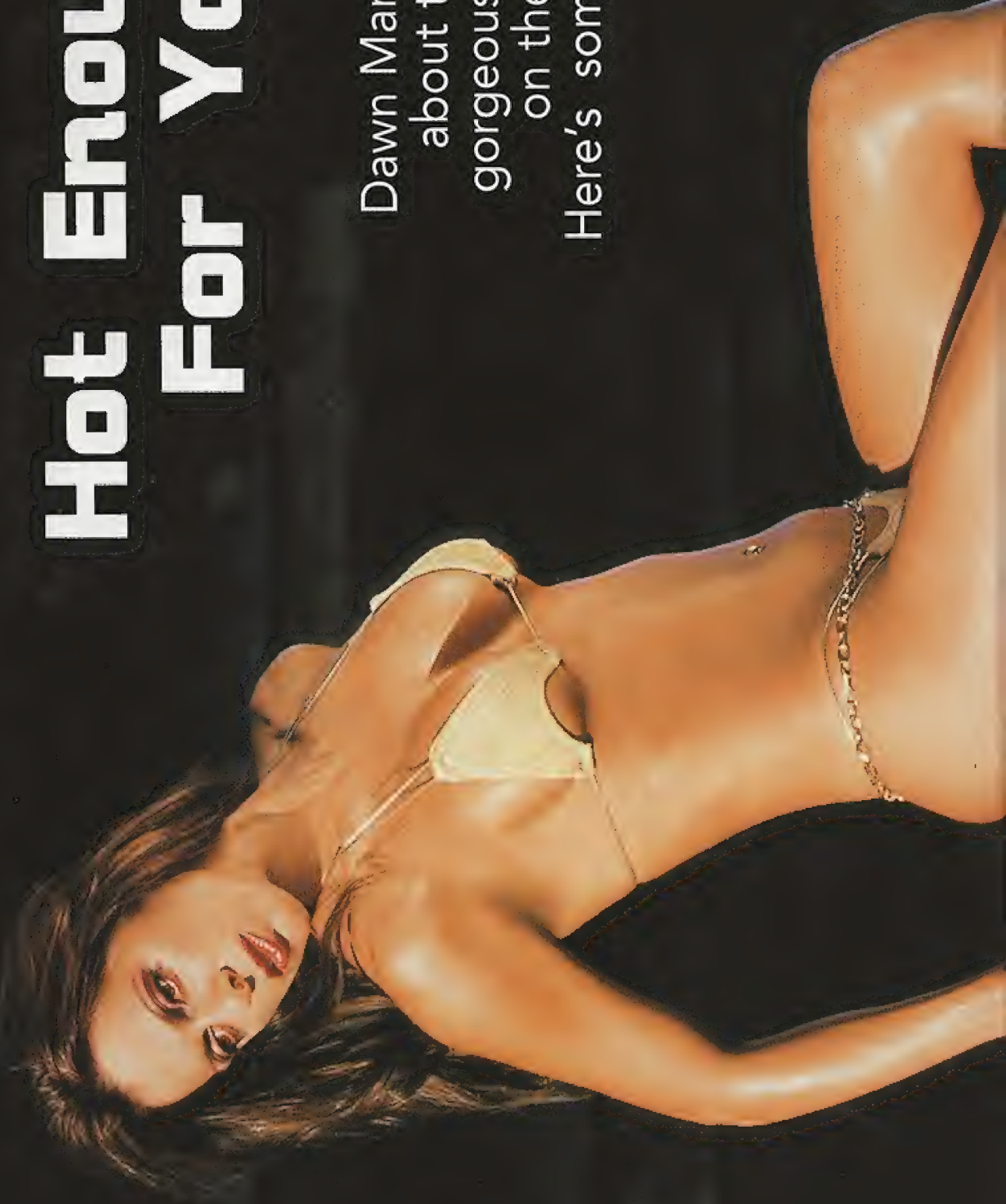
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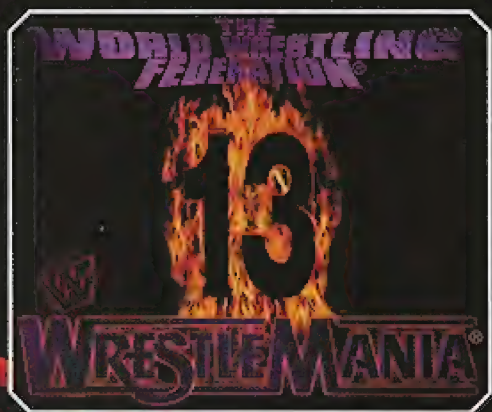
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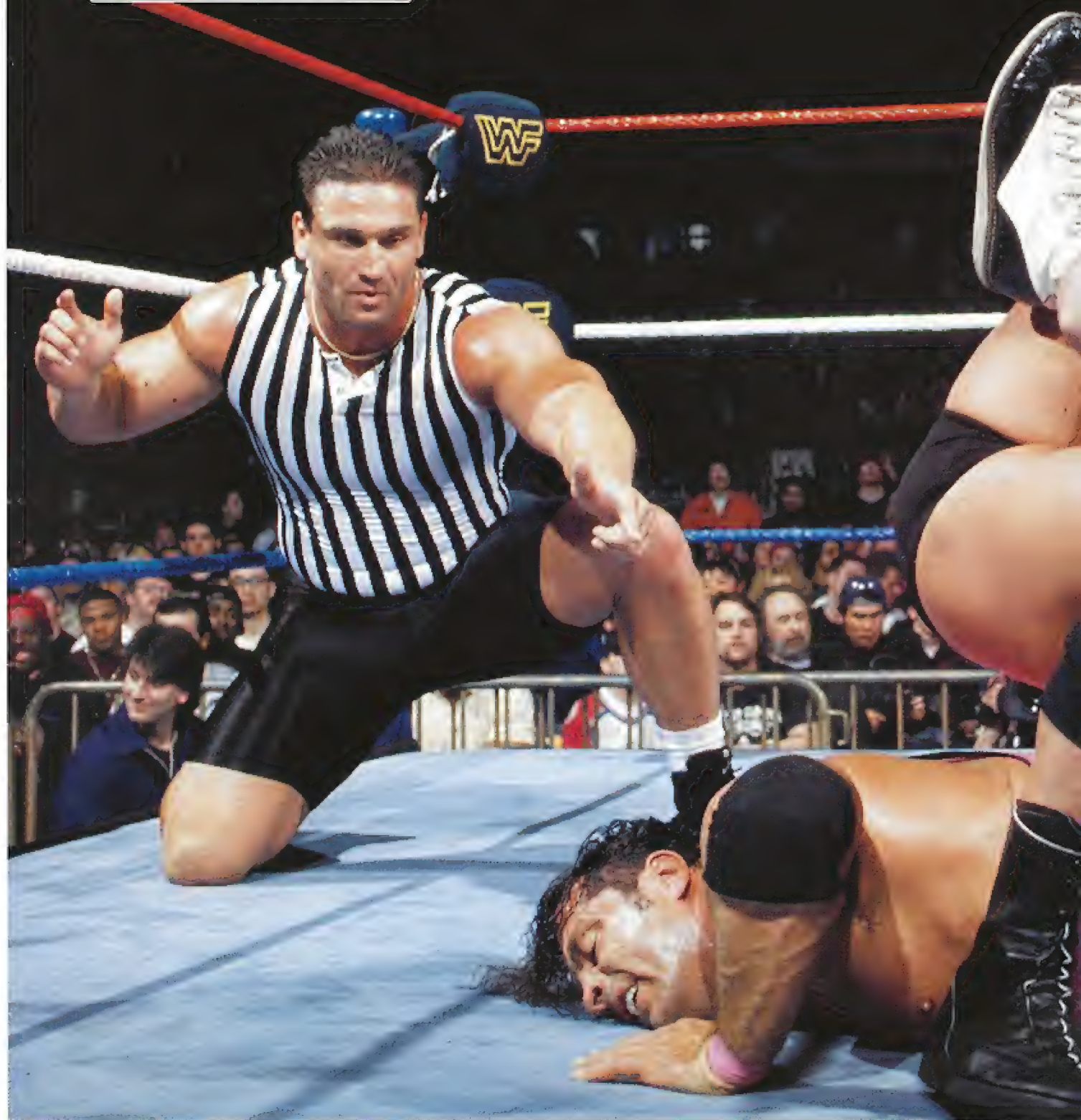








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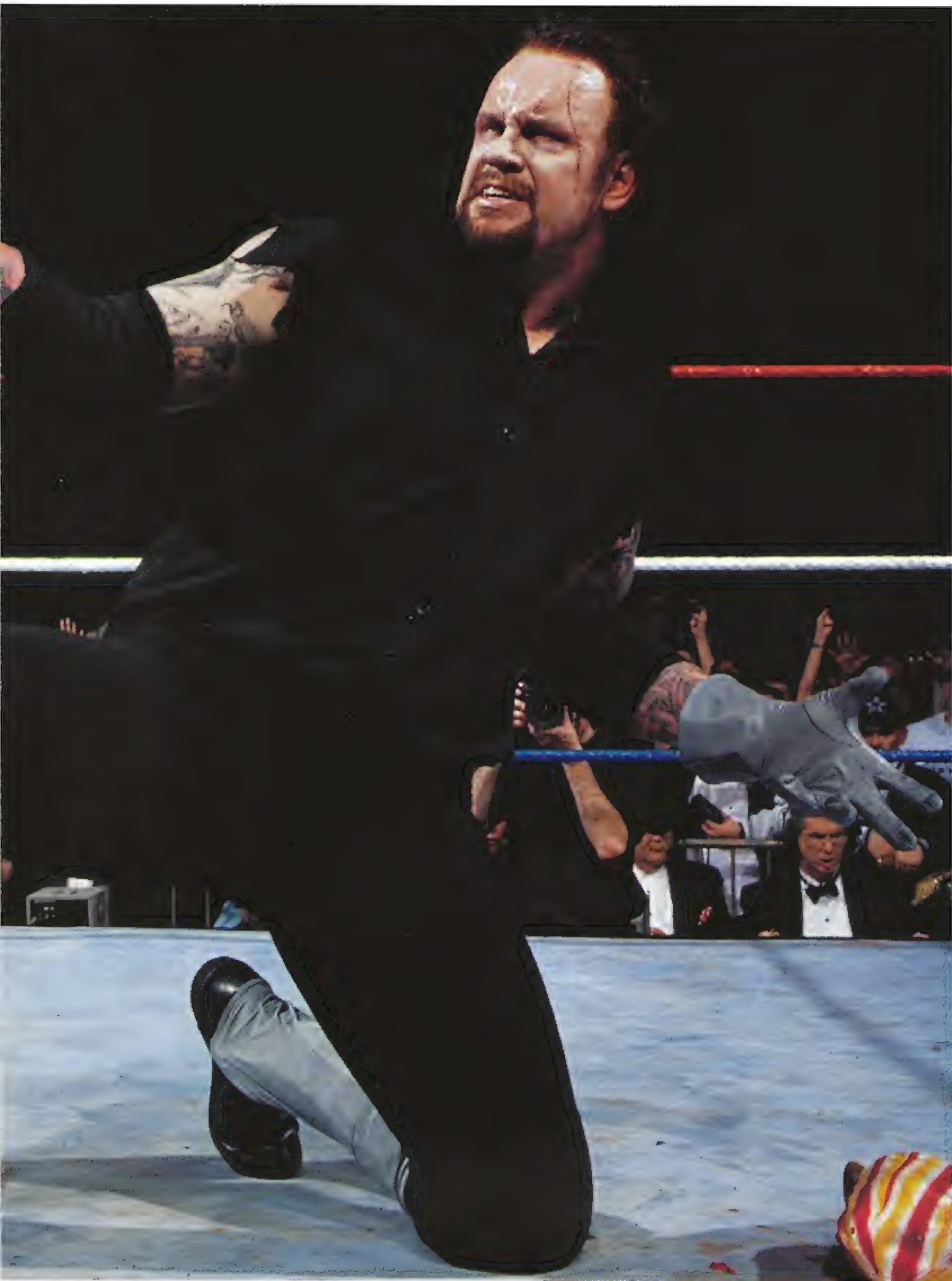














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## The logo for the anime series "Ninja Gaiden". The word "NINJA" is written in a large, stylized, metallic font with a blue and silver gradient and a 3D effect. Below it, the word "GAIDEN" is written in a smaller, similar font, also with a blue and silver gradient and a 3D effect. The background of the logo is a dark, textured surface with red and blue highlights, suggesting a metallic or stone texture.

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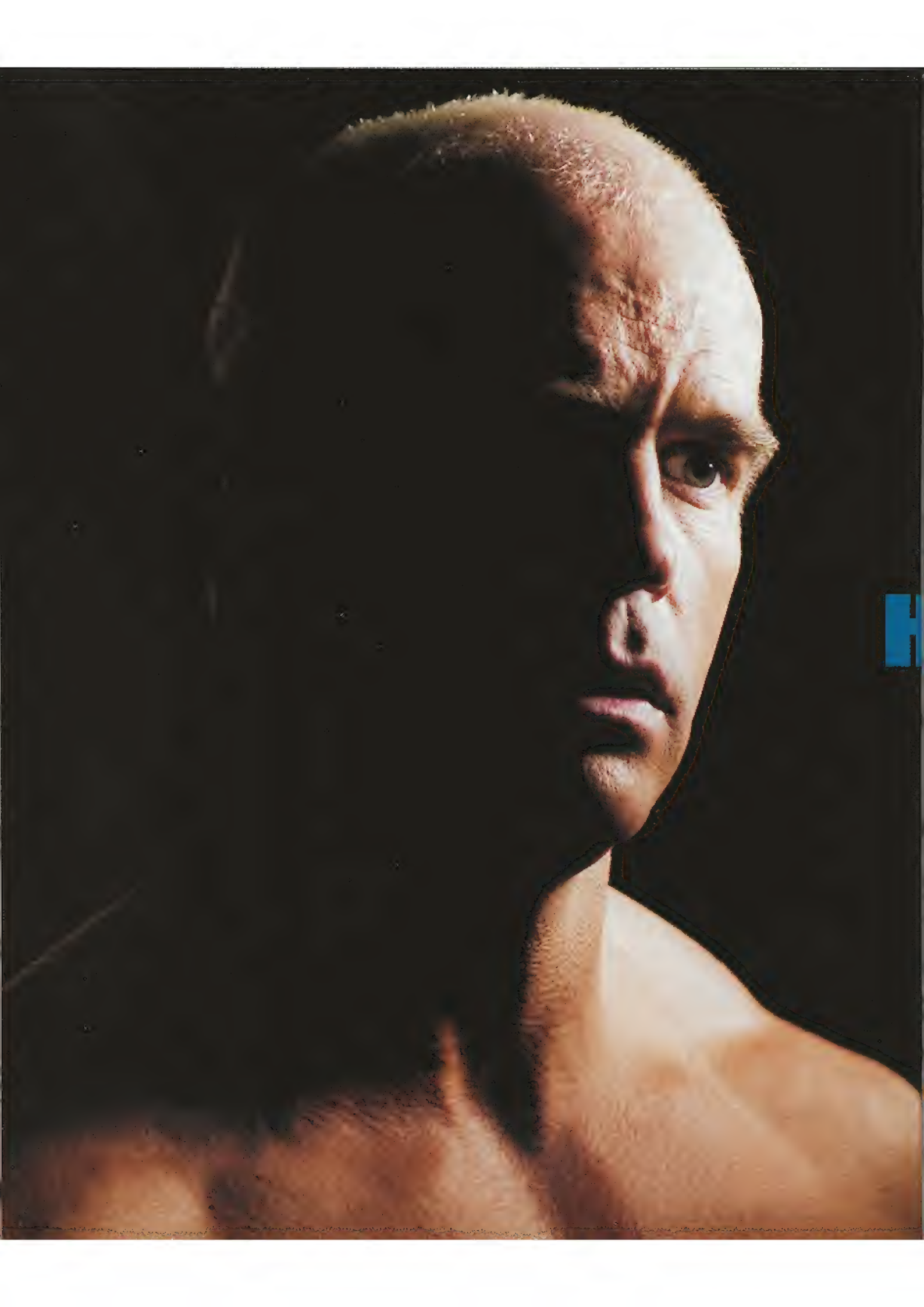


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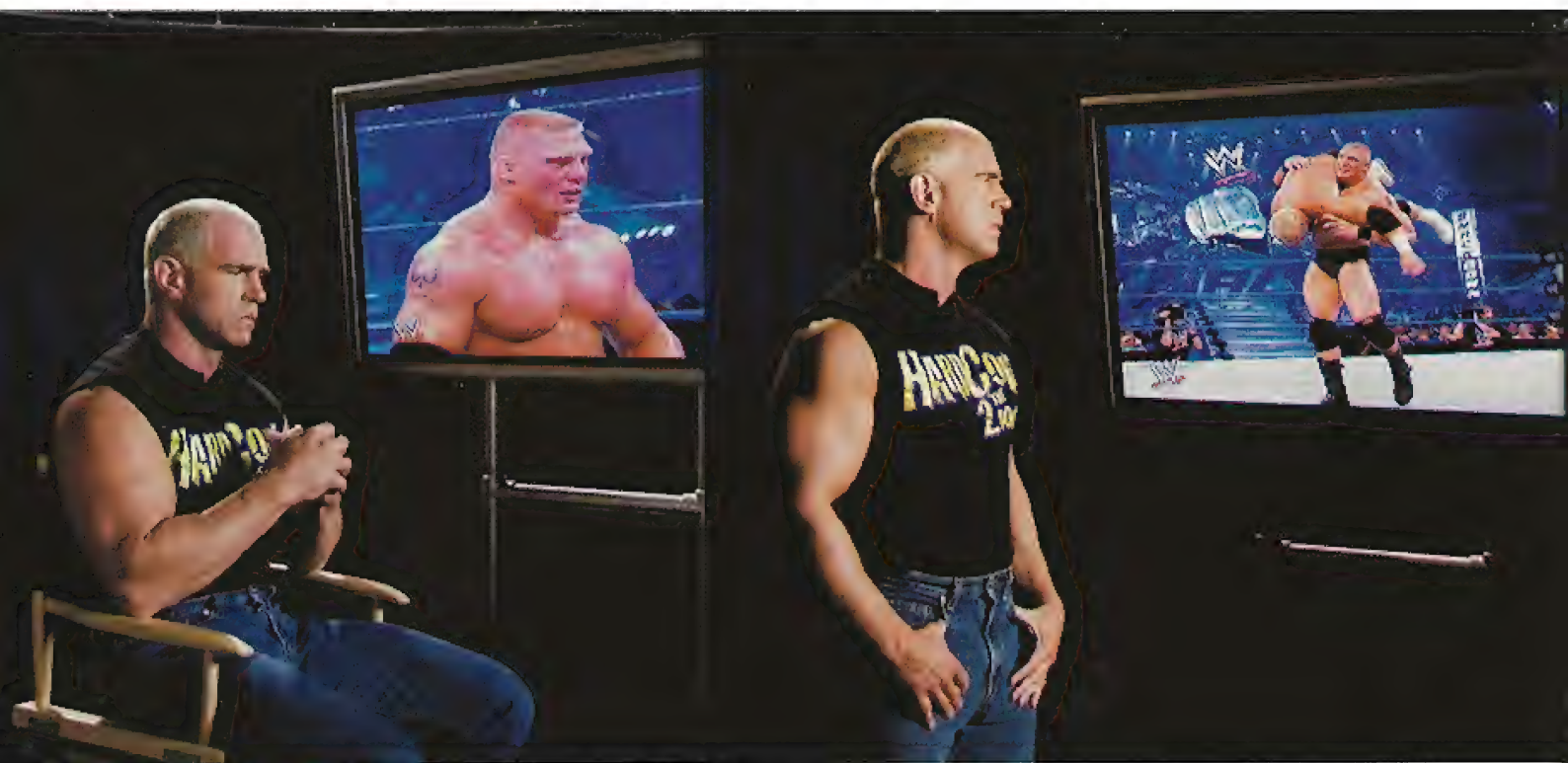
Hardcore  
Holly's Back  
With A  
Vengeance

How You Like Me Now!

**Revenge — re-venge (n.)**

1. The act of taking vengeance for injuries or wrongdoings; retaliation.
2. A desire for revenge; spite or vindictiveness.
3. The driving force behind Hardcore Holly's return to WWE.





**After 13 months**  
of living hell, Hardcore Holly is  
back, and turning *SmackDown!*  
upside down.

On September 12, 2002, Hardcore Holly's life was drastically changed. In a match against Brock Lesnar on *SmackDown!*, he suffered a vicious powerbomb. A month later, Holly underwent career-threatening neck surgery to fix a ruptured disc in his spine. Some figured that this procedure would force the veteran to call it quits, but they were wrong—dead wrong.

"My disc was completely shattered into a bunch of little pieces," Holly says. "They had to go into my hip and take out a piece of bone to replace the disc, then they put a plate in my neck to hold everything together. And because the level that I had fused together isn't going to move anymore, it's going to put more stress on the other parts of my spinal cord. When one part's not moving, something has to give; so it puts more stress on everything else in my neck."

Doctors weren't 100 percent sure Holly would be able to return, but the intangible they didn't consider was Holly's heart and his determination to get back in the ring to continue doing the one thing he loves.

"After [the surgery was deemed successful], Dr. Lloyd Youngblood didn't see any reason why I wouldn't be able to return," Holly says. "Besides, a doctor's advice wasn't going to stop me from coming back. I don't care if he said I wouldn't be able to come back, I would tell him 'Sorry, but I am, and

whether you like it or not.' And that's just that."

One thing Holly didn't expect was another side effect from the surgery. A short time into his recovery, the former Intercontinental Champion suffered a setback that only seemed to make a return seem farther and farther away.

"I got a staph infection in my hip [from where they took the bone out]," Holly says. "So that set me back a little bit, too. In fact, I got really, really sick and lost a ton of weight. At one point, I got down to about 195 pounds, because I couldn't eat and I couldn't do anything. Then the doctor put me on antibiotics, which only made it worse."

"And every time I did try to eat something, it would just come right back up," he says. "It was a difficult time for me. In fact, I'd have to say that those 13 months account for about the worst year or so in my life. Basically, I had everything I love taken away from me. I couldn't work out, I couldn't work on cars, I couldn't ride motocross—I couldn't do any of the things I enjoy doing. I couldn't do anything. And to make matters worse, a month after my surgery, my wife decided she didn't want to be married anymore, so that took a toll on me as well."

Another part of his recovery that made Holly cringe was watching his fellow WWE Superstars compete in the ring week after week, knowing that if he hadn't been injured, he'd be right out there with them.

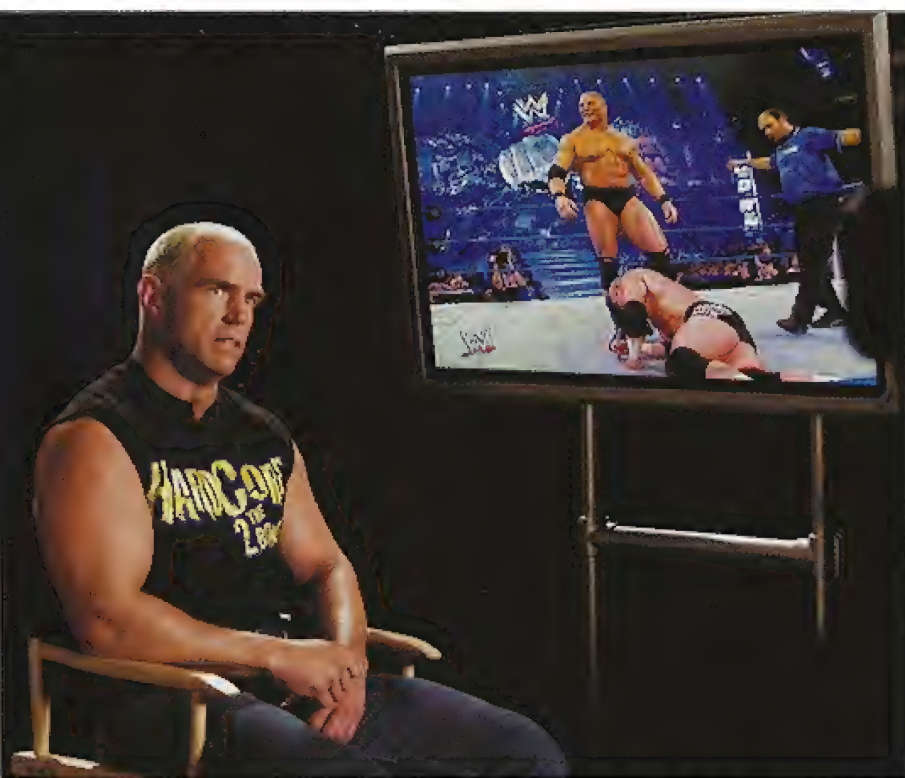
"I had a hard time watching the show, and there was a while when I couldn't watch it because it bothered me," Holly says. "It was so difficult. It got to where it felt like I was really hungry and sitting in a nice restaurant watching everybody eat, but I wasn't allowed to eat. That's really what it felt

**"A doctor's advice wasn't going to stop me from coming back."**









like.

"And when I did watch, I saw a lot of things that pissed me off," he says. "There's really no use in complaining about them, because it's not going to get me anywhere, but it did make me feel like going out there, ripping their heads off, and pulling their lungs out of their body. That's what it made me want to do."

When Holly did turn on the show from time to time, he was forced to see the continued success of Lesnar, the man responsible for putting him out of action. This sight infuriated him, and it fueled his desire to get back in action as soon as possible.

"I want to do to him what he did to me," Holly says. "I want to make him suffer the worst year of his life like I suffered mine. I want to ruin his career and his personal life—because sitting at home and not being able to do anything takes a huge toll on your personal life. If I can break his neck, I will."

"But if there's something I can take from him that means more than his own life and his own family, it's that title," Holly continues. "I think that if I can take the WWE Championship away from him, that will be doing to him the same thing he did to me, because it will make him miserable and it will piss him off. I would basically ruin his life, because that title means more to him than anything."

During his time away, Holly realized that in order for him to accomplish this goal, he would need to come back in good shape. But anyone who knows Bob Holly knows that he doesn't settle for "good"—he aims for greatness.

"Because I sat out for so long, when I came back, I wanted

to come back in better shape than I've ever been in," Holly says. "I had the time to do it and do it right, and since I wasn't on the road or traveling much, there was no reason for me not to come back better than ever. Your body responds better when you have more rest, and when you are on the road, you don't get any rest. I think that really helped me a lot, plus I was able to eat seven meals a day, easily. When you're on the road, it's almost impossible to eat seven times a day, but when I'm sitting at home, that's all I have to do is eat, sleep and work out. So there's no reason why I shouldn't have shown up in the best shape of my life."

Just as he'd planned, he returned to *SmackDown!* looking more ripped than ever. But perhaps the biggest test for Holly was to see how his neck would hold up to the intense in-ring competition.

"So far, it feels pretty good," Holly says. "I'm just really glad to be back. I was out for so long, and I missed it. My neck's feeling good; it doesn't give me any problems whatsoever. I'm taking it one step at a time."

Holly is now ready to write the next chapter in his career. He's paid his dues and feels he is finally ready to reach the next level. He's come a long way from his stints as Thurman "Sparky" Plugg and Bombastic Bob (of the New Midnight Express). Holly remains proud of everything he's accomplished and feels that he has always made the most of what he's been given. Yet, there has been speculation over the years that Holly holds some kind of a grudge about all that. Holly would like the opportunity to clear up any misconceptions about his past.

"I don't know whoever said I resented those characters," Holly says. "First off, I was grateful to Vince [McMahon] for giving me a job. It really doesn't matter what they ask you to do, you're just glad to be in the company, and I'm glad I got that opportunity to be here. I'd like to find out who started that rumor, because it's untrue, and I swear to God I would break their f\*\*\*ing neck, because it's a bunch of bull\*\*\*\*, and nobody should be saying it. So whoever started it can kiss my ass, because I never did say that."

No matter what Holly's been asked to do in WWE, he's always been considered one of the best competitors of his time. Many ring experts agree that he has the best dropkick in the business, and it has been well documented that he has never backed down from a challenge. He's fought against his friends and even his own flesh and blood. Hardcore Holly has been called many different things during his career, but there's one moniker that fits him the best—the Big Shot.

"I've always been the Big Shot, and I'll always be the Big Shot," Holly says. "If anybody gets in my way or tries to stop me from reaching a goal of mine, I'll take them out. I've over-

come so many obstacles, and right now, I'm looking at getting that WWE title. And when I do get that title, I'm going to go into *WrestleMania XX* as the WWE Champion." ■

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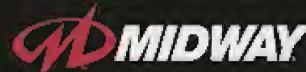
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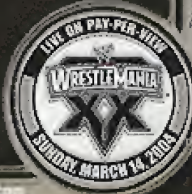
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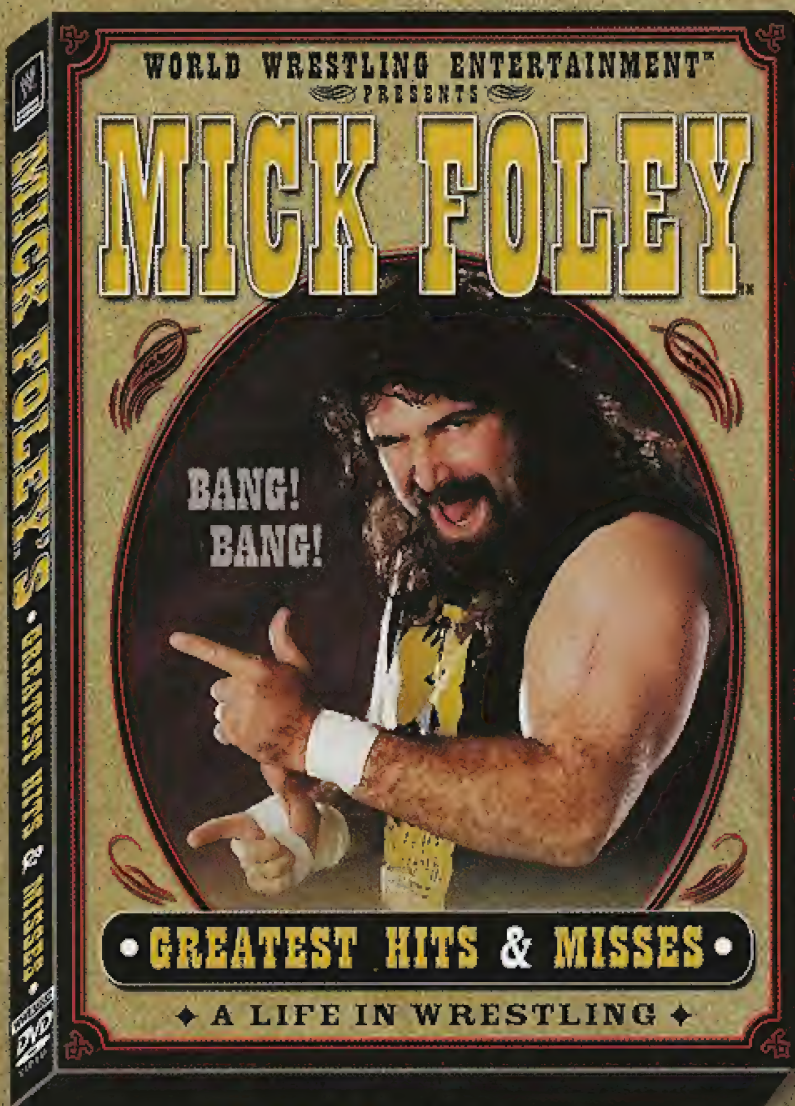
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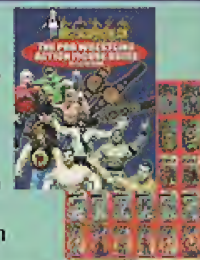


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# Catching Up With Droz

**More than four years after he was left a quadriplegic in a horrible in-ring mishap, Darren Drozdov still knows how to laugh.**



His WWE.com column, *Droz's Two Cents*, is filled with sardonic insights about the wrestling business and life in general, while his banter with fellow guests on *Byte This*, the weekly webcast, often resembles the exchanges of a group of middle school boys in detention.

"We had Bradshaw on recently," Droz says, "and we were laughing our asses off. It was as much fun as anything I'd ever done in my life. I was laughing so hard that I almost forgot where I was."

But when Droz peers down at his once-powerful body, confined to a wheelchair in a home World Wrestling Entertainment customized for his needs, he remembers. It was on October 5, 1999 that Droz was hoisted up by D'Lo Brown for a running powerbomb at New York's Nassau Coliseum. When Droz hit the mat, he instantly knew that something was wrong. A crack

reverberated in his ears as two vertebrae snapped in his neck. On the canvas, he discovered that he was unable to move.

Other WWE Superstars—in particular, Droz's buddy and tag team partner, A-Train—broke into tears. In subsequent years, D'Lo has spoken with Droz on several occasions and repeatedly expressed his regret.

Droz never blamed his opponent for the incident. Every kid who laces up a pair of boots understands that injury may be waiting on the other side of the curtain. WWE continued to pay his salary, and Droz—while continuing his physical therapy sessions—emerged as a clever, perceptive columnist. But now, the jock who'd played in the NFL before he entered WWE was forced to adjust to a very different kind of life. He found inspiration from things he might have overlooked in the past.

During a recent stay at the Rehab Institute of St. Louis, Droz befriended a 13-year-old accident victim named Jeffrey. "Anyone who finds themselves in this kind of situation is unfortunate," Droz says. "But at least I had a full life. This kid is so young. But then, I look at him and he's so gung-ho over everything. His attitude is so positive. He doesn't seem to feel sorry for himself at all."

"I find myself saying, 'I wish I had that point of view about things, that fire.' It's like he won't let anything stop him," he says. "When I've seen him





By Keith Elliot Greenberg





make improvements, not only have I felt happy for Jeffery, I was also happy for myself, just being around him."

As the years have passed, Droz has also developed a greater appreciation of close family and friends who've proven their loyalty by intertwining his goals with their own.

When we last profiled Droz, he felt nothing below his chest, with the exception of some sensation in his thumb. He could move his head and neck, and lift his elbows to gesture. When he read, someone had to place the periodical on a stand and turn the pages. He used a speakerphone to chat. In his wheelchair, he could manipulate the toggles to recline, operate devices via remote control and move around a room. A home attendant had to feed him.

"I'm sorry to say it, but there's been no change," he says. "It's the same as before. I haven't regained any kind of feeling. Things can improve at any time—you never know. But it's foolish to have expectations that are too high. If you're not realistic, you're setting yourself up to feel very let down."

The shoulder injuries Droz suffered while playing football at the University of Maryland and with the Denver Broncos, among other teams, have

inhibited his rehab. But Droz also believes that he could have pushed himself harder. At one point, he concedes, he became complacent, working with a trainer in his Mays Landing, New Jersey home, and stopped attending an outside rehabilitation center. "I really wasn't getting the exercise I needed," he explains.

In October, he checked into the St. Louis facility. Never one to pass on making an ironic observation, he took special note of the city's wrestling legacy: St. Louis is the birthplace of icons like Lou Thesz and "Classy" Freddie Blassie, and the location of championship victories for such ring greats as Ed "Strangler" Lewis, "Whipper" Billy Watson, Gene Kiniski, Harley Race, "Nature Boy" Ric Flair and The Rock.

"Some of the older people at the center talked to me about watching wrestling at the Kiel Auditorium," Droz says. "I told them that, as soon as I get better, I'm going to be Thesz-pressing people all over the institute."

He found out about the center while watching a story on 20/20 about actor Christopher Reeve. "In some ways, I'm more fortunate than him," Droz says. "His spinal cord was severed. Mine was only bruised. When I saw the type of work that the institute did, I felt that this was the kind of place that could help me get my life in order."

During rehab sessions at the facility, Droz was placed at a table, and forced to maintain his balance while knocking away a beach ball with his hands. He was also exposed to a wide range of equipment.

Electrodes were used to stimulate his muscles while he sat on an "Ergys Bike." "A trainer got down, moving the pedals to get the muscles to start twitching," Droz says. "It's strange to be looking at my legs on a bicycle, moving again. It's a good feeling, something that I'd like to see happen naturally one day."

He was also locked upright in an "Easy Stand." After endlessly sitting in a wheelchair, he was finally pushing his body in new ways to improve his strength and circulation.

Droz plans to have both items shipped to his home. In the meantime,

he credits his Internet column with providing a certain therapeutic value.

"It helps connect me to the business," he says. "I think the fans like it because I've been in the ring and understand what it takes. But now I'm a fan just like them, and I can relate to their opinions, watching from a distance."

Several months ago, he wrote one of his saddest columns, when his former tag-team partner, Mike "Hawk" Hegstrand of the Road Warriors, passed away. "Mike was someone who lived life to the fullest," Droz says. "He showed me the ropes when I was learning about the business and took care of me. He was the nicest guy in the world."

As WWE's roster expands, Droz is heartened by the infusion of a new breed of wrestlers to critique in *Droz's Two Cents*.

"I love watching Garrison Cade & Mark Jindrak, Randy Orton and John Cena," Droz says. "Look at what these guys have accomplished so far. They bring a lot of excitement to the business. It kind of reminds me of when I was training with A-Train, Edge, Test and Val Venis. We all knew that there were big things ahead in the future."

If any fans disagree with this comparison, Droz welcomes them to send him an e-mail and challenge his assessments. "I have guys who get so caught up in these things that they e-mail me and call me out," he says. "I e-mail them back to say, 'Hey man, in case you don't remember, I'm in a wheelchair.'"

In reality, he finds the online exchanges invigorating: "I have 700 e-mails waiting for me right now," he says. "It's just hard to answer everybody because I type with the side of my hand. But what's great is that people not only write to offer their support and love, they ask me to encourage them. And I do."

"I've used my experience to realize certain truths about life. And now I know that anyone who's going through a tough time should remember that there's always a tomorrow, and always a brighter day." ■

To reach Droz via e-mail, send your questions or feedback to his column mailbox: [Droz2cents@aol.com](mailto:Droz2cents@aol.com)



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CUT ALONG DOTTED LINE



# MY FAVORITE MATCH

Eddie Guerrero

## Frightfully Good

**WCW Halloween Havoc**

**Las Vegas, NV**

**October 27, 1997**

As most WWE enthusiasts know, Eddie Guerrero is one of the greatest technical wrestlers to ever compete in a ring, so for him to narrow down his best matches to just one would be like asking Picasso to choose a favorite painting. Before deciding which match stands out the most in his mind, Eddie reflected on some of the classic matches and rivalries that were his favorites.

"I've had a lot of great matches with Rey Mysterio, Dean Malenko and Chris Benoit in ECW, WCW and WWE," he says. "Those were great matches, but probably my greatest rivalry was with Dean. When I wrestled for ECW in 1995, I had a series of about five or six matches with Malenko. Every match we had was just phenomenal; we actually had a couple of straight matches that went 30 minutes each. When I was out there [in front of the live crowd], it just flowed with him. Dean is just a really great wrestler. It's a weird analogy, but when I think of Dean competing in the ring, he reminds me of a ballerina because he is just so fluid and graceful in every move that he does. Those are matches that I will always remember.

"The same can really be said for Chris Benoit," Guerrero says. "Chris and I have always had great matches. In fact, the last match we had a few months ago for the U.S. title at *Vengeance* was a really great match. And it was different, because usually he and I do just pure technical wrestling, but in this match, a little bit of both our personalities really came out. I think that this was the match that defined Chris and I coming to WWE, as far as being able to make the change from being just a mat wrestler to also being an entertainer."

Eddie admitted that while he loves







all of his matches, there is one special match that he looks back on as one of his best.

"While those other great matches stand out to me, there's this one match I had in WCW that really sticks out in my mind as far as being memorable," Guerrero says. "It's the one I had with Rey Mysterio at *Halloween Havoc* in 1997. That match just clicked, everything was right. It was a Cruiserweight title match, and the stipulations were that if I lost, Rey would win my title, but if I won, then Rey would have to lose his mask.

"I was real proud of [this match] because I had a lot to prove personally, and Rey did as well," Eddie says. "It was just one of those magical moments that you feel inside. At that time, I was really hated by the fans, so there was a huge 'Eddie Sucks, Eddie Sucks' chant going, and in my opinion, having the fans scream 'Eddie Sucks, Eddie Sucks' is just as good as applause.

"During that match, we did this





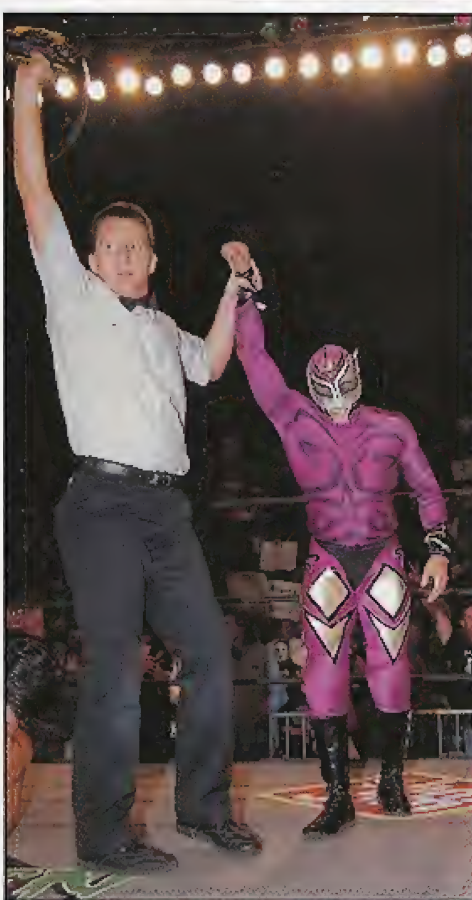


amazing move that we haven't been able to do since," Guerrero says. "I had him by the hands and he basically springboarded himself up to the top rope and flipped in the air. On his way down, he caught me and turned it into a DDT. But what makes the move even more unique is that Rey's feet never even touched the mat. It was just like one big, beautiful movement. I have to tell you, that's one move that really stands out in my mind."

That particular move was just one of many that helped make Eddie's match against Mysterio a classic.

Right from the start, it was evident that this match was going to be something special. The raucous Vegas crowd nearly jeered Eddie out of the building, and it wildly celebrated each of Mysterio's offensive maneuvers.

During the match, Eddie and Rey executed some spectacular maneuvers. From inverted 619s and corkscrew planchas to springboard body presses and Gory Specials (a maneuver made famous by Eddie's father, Gory Guerrero), the match had it all, and delivered fast-paced action that easily

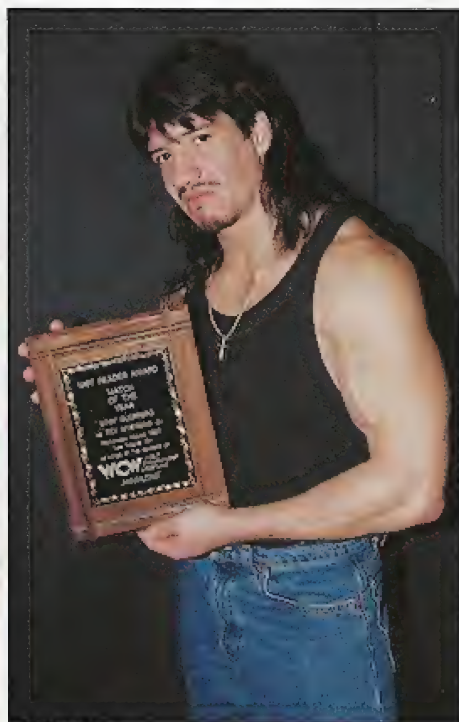


stole the show. Throughout the contest, Guerrero repeatedly tried to remove Mysterio's mask, to no avail. Torn mask and all, Mysterio secured the victory after reversing a Razor's Edge powerbomb off the top turnbuckle into a huracanrana.

Eddie Guerrero's month-and-a-half reign as the WCW Cruiserweight Champion came to an end, but he still delivered a five-star match that fans fondly remember. Ironically, both Superstars now belong to the *SmackDown!* roster, so the possibility exists that the two could re-ignite this classic rivalry. But until then, Eddie is content to look back at this great match and appreciate where his hard work and dedication have brought him.

"Even though Rey did win the title," Guerrero says, "it was just a really memorable match—a match that was voted the 1997 Match of the Year."

*[Editor's Note: Eddie Guerrero's match against Rey Mysterio from Halloween Havoc can be seen on Rey Mysterio: 619, available on VHS and DVD wherever WWE home videos are sold.]*







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# Hammer Time

## Greg Valentine is Still Going Strong

Greg "The Hammer" Valentine still remembers the dull sound that rang through the Greensboro Coliseum on that night nearly 25 years ago, when he broke Ric Flair's nose.

The two had started the evening as tag-team partners. But midway through their battle against Gene & Ole Anderson, "The Hammer" refused to accept his partner's tag. Instead, he grabbed a cane and broke it across the "Nature Boy's" face.

"It was made out of hickory," Valentine says. "That's what they make baseball bats from. I thought the cane would break, but I busted Flair's nose instead. Blood splattered in so many places, I was scared. Believe it or not, Ric actually seemed happy afterward. All he was thinking about was the money we'd be making."

Today, the 54-year-old Valentine believes that they could pick up the rivalry exactly where it left off. "I think WWE should book me against Flair," he says. "We're about the same age. We're both in shape. We have a history. We both learned a lot about the business from my father [the legendary Johnny Valentine]. It would be a natural."

The former WWE Intercontinental and Tag Team Champion still wrestles every weekend on the North American independent circuit, as well as in Europe, Japan and India. During the week, he trains

students at the Florida gym owned by his friend, Steve Keirn—who, in the early '90s, appeared in WWE as Skinner.

"I've never had to do anything outside the wrestling business to earn a living," Valentine says with pride. "My first love has always been wrestling, and my last love has always been wrestling."

As his father headlined arenas from Tokyo to New York City, the boy born

John Wisniski, Jr. grew up with his mother in Seattle—far from the epicenter of the American wrestling universe—and contemplated a career in broadcast journalism. He lifted weights and wrestled in high school, but admits, "I wasn't all that good. I was too heavy to wrestle lightweights, and too light to wrestle heavyweights. It was an awkward age."

In the summer of 1969, he traveled







**Greg Valentine was one of WWE's finest ring technicians. He had some of his greatest mat wars with Tito Santana (above) during the mid-1980s. These two fought battles over the Intercontinental title and lent prestige to the gold.**

with his father throughout Texas—where Johnny Valentine was rumbling with the legendary Fritz Von Erich and Wahoo McDaniel—and then St. Louis, the headquarters of the National Wrestling Alliance (NWA) at the time.

"My dad was really like my older brother, and that was okay," Greg says. "We hung out together, without any women around to tell us what to do."

The senior Valentine—one of the

most notorious "ribbers" in the game—even subjected his son to a few practical jokes, summoning him to a hotel room, then dousing the young man with a bucket of water as soon as he stepped through the door.

Greg insists that he, however, rarely played pranks on other wrestlers. "I really couldn't," he says. "Because of my father's reputation, everyone had their eyes on me. I was caught before I

started."

By the time the summer vacation ended, Greg had decided to follow his father into the grappling fraternity. So Johnny Valentine called Stu Hart and asked the grizzled trainer to take the youngster into to the family's infamous "Dungeon" in Calgary.

Greg was a tough kid, and he withstood Hart's torturous lessons. In March 1970, wrestling as Johnny Valentine, Jr.,

## **Some were expecting a second Johnny Valentine, but Greg was his own man.**

he made his in-ring debut, losing to Angelo "King Kong" Mosca.

For the next several months, the rookie wrestled and refereed for the Hart family's Stampede Wrestling promotion. After a while, Valentine was anxious for a change. "I wasn't looking forward to another winter up there," he says.

Moving to Detroit, Valentine began training with Ed Farhat, the original Sheik, who promoted the area and main-evented as its primary heel. The Sheik's matches were often short; he tended to overwhelm opponents by cutting them with a sharp instrument hidden in the trunks, or he'd unleash a fireball at their faces. But, from time to time, Valentine says, the man would get down on the mat for 20 minutes and exchange holds with his foe.

"He knew what he was doing," Greg says, "but he wanted to maintain that mystique. He thought that if his matches went longer than three or four minutes, the fans would no longer want to see him again."

In Detroit, the rookie discarded the Johnny Valentine, Jr. moniker ("the shoes were too big to fill"), and became part of another "family": working as Don Fargo's brother, Johnny.

"Don was a unique guy," Greg says. "I learned a lot about interview skills, watching him talk out of the corner of his mouth. He could get heat from the



fans right away, like Buddy Rogers or Freddie Blassie. And he taught me about crowd psychology, keeping the fans with you in a match."

In 1973, Valentine officially took the name "Greg," and reunited with his father in Florida. "We said we were brothers because my dad didn't want to give away his age," he says. "Now, I had my father teaching me things, as well as [legendary Tampa-based promoter] Eddie Graham."

Greg became one of the territory's young lions, along with Keirn, Kevin Sullivan and Graham's son, Mike.

"We did a lot of good, solid, technical wrestling," Valentine says. "And I felt that, after the things I'd learned in Calgary and Detroit, I was really developing."

On the afternoon of Oct. 5, 1975, tragedy struck when Johnny Valentine was in an airplane crash before a show in Wilmington, North Carolina. He'd been seated next to the pilot, Michael Farkas, who died in the accident. Ric Flair was on board, and he suffered a broken back. Of the other passengers, former Miami Dolphins linebacker Bob Bruggers never returned to wrestling, while Tim "Mr. Wrestling" Woods and Mid-Atlantic Wrestling announcer David Crockett were banged up, but later resumed their careers. The elder Valentine was paralyzed below the waist.

"After my dad went down, Ric took over his spot as the top heel in the Carolinas," Greg says. "And I was brought in to be his tag-team partner."

Some were expecting a second Johnny Valentine, but, by now, Greg was his own man. He picked up the name "The Hammer" from bending his opponents backward over the ropes and whacking them with a hard elbow. He and Flair dazzled the territory with their striking blond locks and elaborate, long robes made by the late Olivia Walker, wife of "Mr. Wrestling II" Johnny Walker.

"We were tailor-made for each other,"

**During his tag-team days, Valentine often found himself in the ring with Davey Boy Smith (right) and the Dynamite Kid.**

Valentine says. "Flair did all the flying around, taking these high backdrops and going over the top rope. I wrestled low to the ground. And we'd both learned a lot about the business from my father."

In 1979, he made his first WWE run, which was highlighted when he broke

the leg of the popular Chief Jay Strongbow with a figure-four leg lock (in later years, Valentine would use a shin guard for greater impact while applying the move) at a TV taping in Hamburg, Pennsylvania.

"I had to fight my way out of that





little arena," he says. "The fans wanted to kill me. I was scheduled to wrestle the champion, Bob Backlund, after that at Madison Square Garden. But, on the day of the show, there was a snowstorm. I was worried that the card would be cancelled. Instead, we were sold out."

Backlund would go on to become one of Valentine's favorite opponents. "Every time I wrestled him, it was a great physical contest—one hold after another, with no breaks. He pushed me further than I'd ever been pushed before."

For the next few years, Valentine bounced between the Mid-Atlantic territory and WWE, and he gained a reputation as a brute in each locale. After he broke Flair's nose in North Carolina, Greg suplexed WWE Intercontinental titlist Pedro Morales four times on the concrete floor, which led to a bitter series of clashes. Then, it was back to Mid-Atlantic, where "The Hammer" broke Roddy Piper's eardrum, which started a bitter rivalry that culminated in a Dog Collar Match at *Starrcade '83*.

"Whenever I wrestled Piper during that period, I'd beat on his ear with my elbow," Valentine says. "He'd start bleeding from the ear and fighting for his life. On interviews, I'd make light of the whole thing, calling 1983 'The Year of the Ear.'"

The next year, Valentine was again at the center of controversy in WWE when he broke Tito Santana's leg in a confrontation and took his Intercontinental title. Santana would get his revenge in 1985, winning back the championship in a thrilling cage match in Baltimore.

Greg would remain in WWE for the next seven years. On Aug. 24, 1985, Valentine & Brutus Beefcake—a.k.a. The Dream Team—defeated Mike Rotundo & Barry Windham for the World Tag Team Championship. They held the titles until they lost to the British Bulldogs at *WrestleMania 2*.

"I was mentoring Beefcake at first," Valentine says. "But by *WrestleMania 2*, he was coming into his own. The matches we had with the Bulldogs were classics. They were a very physical team. They used moves that no one had ever seen before in the U.S. I had to speed it



up to keep pace with them, and Beefcake became a better wrestler, too."

After Beefcake branched out on his own, Valentine and Dino Bravo formed the "New Dream Team," with disappointing results.

"You couldn't duplicate the original Dream Team's success just by giving me a new partner and a slightly different name," Valentine says.

Valentine felt directionless until "Rugged" Ronnie Garvin stepped into his path. Greg initially beat Garvin in a retirement match. But Garvin later returned as a referee, sabotaging so many of "The Hammer's" matches that Valentine demanded a reinstatement—and a series of matches.

"That was my kind of guy," Valentine says. "He beat on me. I beat on him. We wrestled. Oh God, I'd found my niche again."

It was announcer and future Minnesota Gov. Jesse "The Body" Ventura who conceptualized "The Hammer's" next persona. As Valentine was walking to the ring with his new tag-team partner, the Honky Tonk Man, The Body muttered to Vince McMahon,

"Wouldn't it be great if Valentine dyed his hair black, just like his partner?"

For several months, the tandem's manager, Jimmy Hart, carried a bottle of black hair dye to different arenas, delivering lectures on the value of a makeover to Valentine. Eventually Valentine relented, and he and Honky Tonk Man ignited fan interest as "Rhythm & Blues." When the two performed a concert at *WrestleMania VI*, however, "The Hammer" was less than enthused.

"At the time, I hated the whole idea of Rhythm & Blues," he says. "I was trained to be a wrestler—not this. But now, I look back on it, and it was fun. I got to be a showman."

But Valentine soon began to fade from the major league spotlight. He did a stint in World Championship Wrestling (WCW) in 1992, where he won the U.S. Tag Team titles with Terry Taylor, and returned to WWE at the 1993 *Survivor Series* as a masked "Blue Knight"—on a team headed by Shawn Michaels against Bret Hart and a collection of his brothers. After the 1994 *Royal Rumble*, Valentine left the company again. He briefly resurfaced in WCW in 1997.

While the "Monday Night Wars" were being fought between WWE and WCW, Valentine claims to have had a "re-birth" on the independent circuit. From all those years of being on top, I'm pretty recognizable, and promoters and fans seemed excited to have me."

Despite his age, Valentine is confident he is as proficient in the ring now as when he challenged Hulk Hogan for the WWE Championship in 1985.

"A few years ago, I took a few months off to go out on my boat and relax," he says. "But I missed wrestling too much. When I first came back, I didn't feel like Greg Valentine. So I booked myself in England, and asked the promoter to put me in two matches every day. And when that tour ended, I was back."

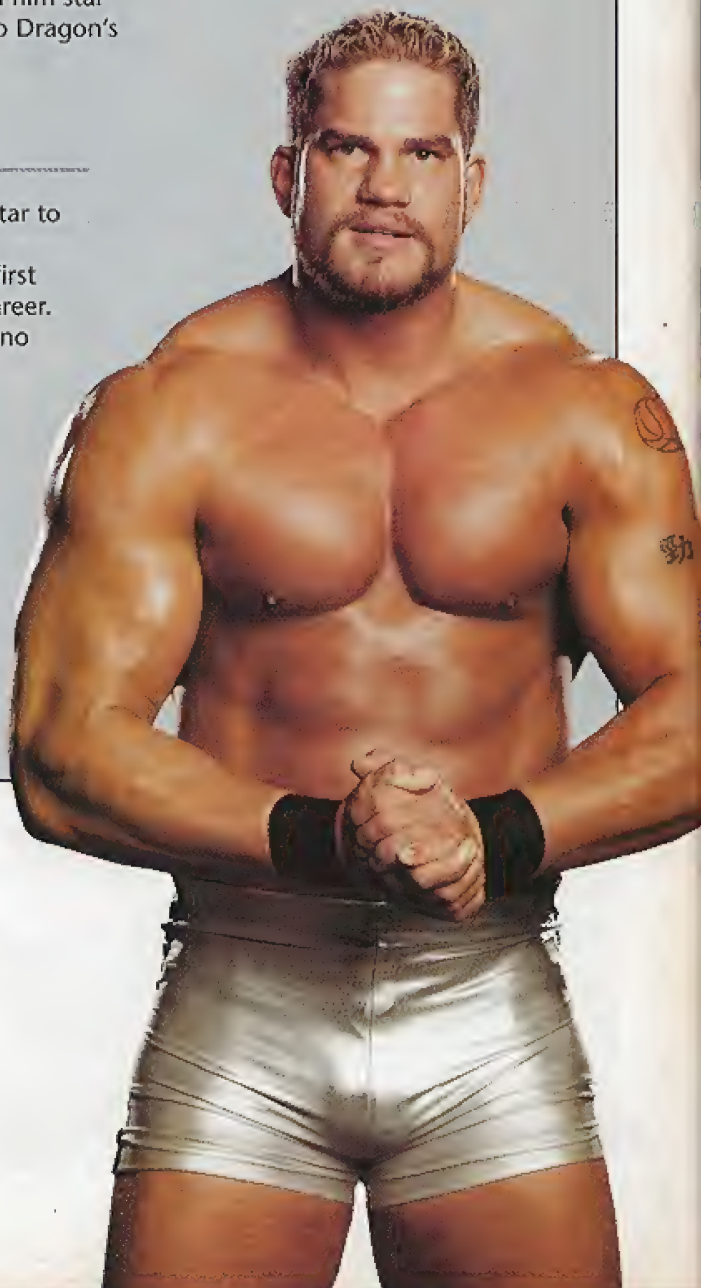
Today, at the departure gate of an airport or the parking lot of a gym, "The Hammer" repeatedly hears the same question: "Why aren't you in WWE right now?"

His answer is always the same: "Who knows? Someday." ■



### Multiple Choice:

1. Who did Ultimate Warrior defeat for the WWE Championship?
  - ☐ a. Hulk Hogan
  - ☐ b. Sgt. Slaughter
  - ☐ c. Undertaker
2. Who did Pedro Morales defeat for the WWE Championship?
  - ☐ a. Stan "The Man" Stasiak
  - ☐ b. Ivan Koloff
  - ☐ c. Bob Backlund
3. Who won the first *Royal Rumble*?
  - ☐ a. Hacksaw Jim Duggan
  - ☐ b. Big John Studd
  - ☐ c. The One Man Gang
4. Which one of the following has never held the Cruiserweight Championship?
  - ☐ a. Rey Mysterio
  - ☐ b. Tajiri
  - ☐ c. Funaki
5. The WWE United States title is traced back to the NWA/WCW United States title. Who was the first holder of the championship?
  - ☐ a. Terry Funk
  - ☐ b. Ricky Steamboat
  - ☐ c. Harley Race
6. Who was Bam Bam Bigelow's first WWE manager?
  - ☐ a. Slick
  - ☐ b. Mr. Fuji
  - ☐ c. Oliver Humperdink
7. Who was Spanky's first opponent in WWE?
  - ☐ a. Kurt Angle
  - ☐ b. Shannon Moore
  - ☐ c. Jamie Noble
8. Who did Big Show defeat for the WCW World Championship back in his days as The Giant?
  - ☐ a. Lex Luger
  - ☐ b. Ric Flair
  - ☐ c. Sting
9. What legendary action film star is referenced by Ultimo Dragon's name?
  - ☐ a. Chuck Norris
  - ☐ b. Bruce Lee
  - ☐ c. Jackie Chan
10. Name the only Superstar to ever win the WWE Championship as the first wrestling title of his career.
  - ☐ a. Bruno Sammartino
  - ☐ b. Yokozuna
  - ☐ c. Brock Lesnar
11. What event featured the first steel cage match in the history of pay-per-view?
  - ☐ a. *WrestleMania 2*
  - ☐ b. *WrestleMania*
  - ☐ c. *SummerSlam '88*
12. What was George "The Animal" Steele's finishing maneuver?
  - ☐ a. Full nelson
  - ☐ b. Running kneedrop
  - ☐ c. Flying hammerlock
13. Who did Matt Morgan powerbomb in his first WWE appearance?
  - ☐ a. Chris Benoit
  - ☐ b. Nathan Jones
  - ☐ c. Kurt Angle

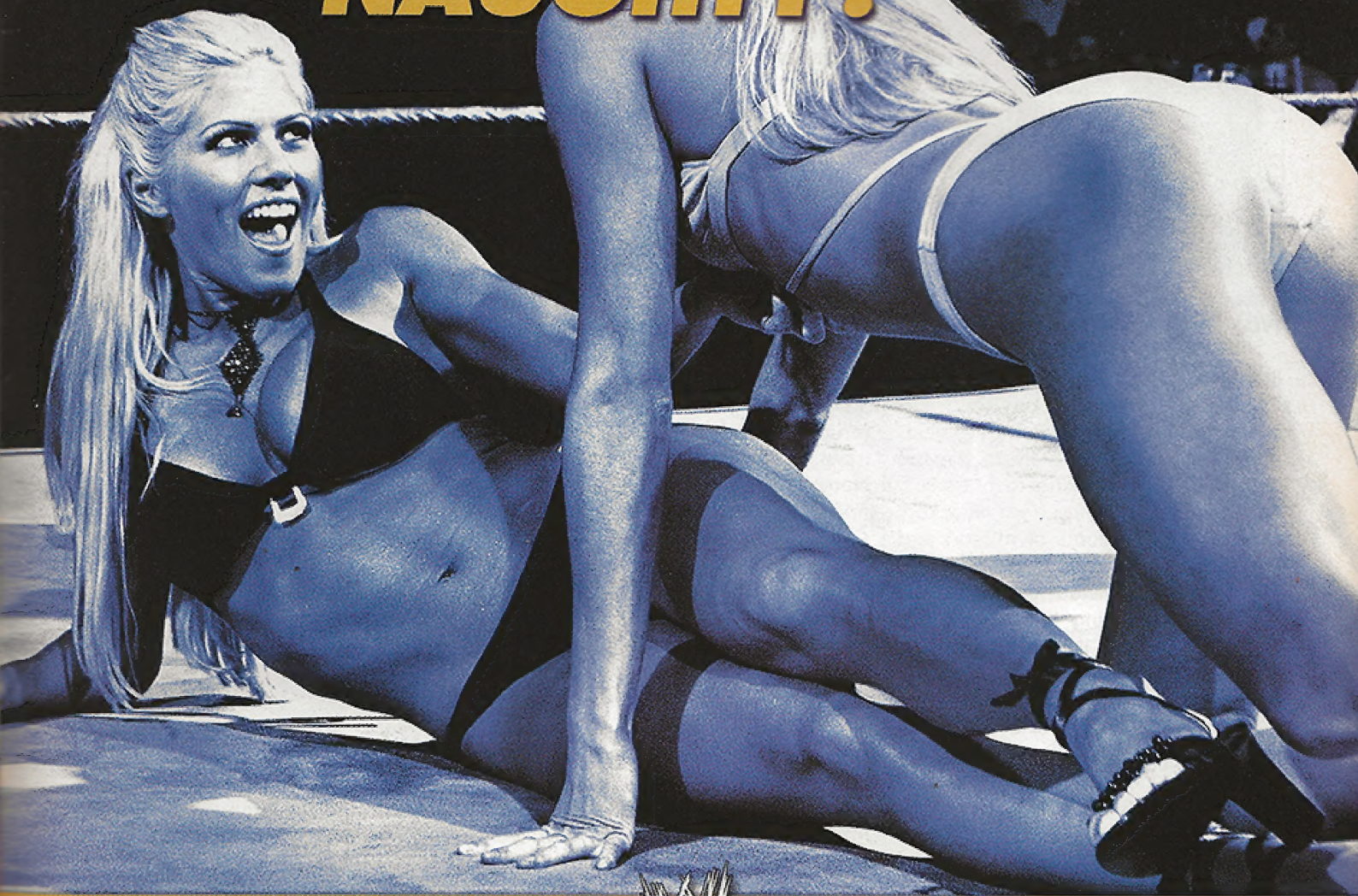


Answers:

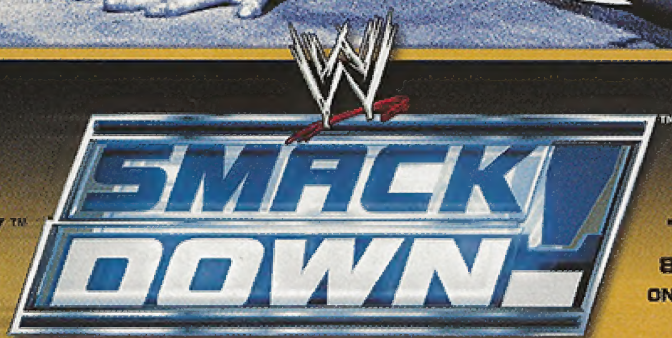
1.) a. He lost the title to Slaughter; 2.) b. He lost the title to Stasiak; 3.) a. The first pay-per-view edition was won by Studd; 4.) c; 5.) c. Race won a tournament final in 1975; 6.) a; 7.) a; 8.) b. The win occurred in 1996; 9.) b. Lee was known as "The Dragon"; 10.) c; 11.) a; 12.) c; 13.) c.



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## Gadgets, Gizmos & Games!



**Yours truly** isn't a computer geek or a gizmo wiz by any means! But I needed to enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century, so I've put together a list of some of my favorite little toys for big boys and big girls. I guess I need to point out that I had a little help—very little help—putting this edition of "Tales From The Hook" together from Josh Mathews, who I guess some would call a broadcast colleague of mine.

*So here we go!*

### No. 1: iPod

If you don't have one of these cool little numbers, believe me, get one. Obviously, people in my business travel every single week and music helps pass time while one is flying, driving or sitting around talking to one's self. For example, I'm flying from New York to San Jose (six hours of misery) and I'm sitting next to some goofy looking dude that pulls out a portable CD player. I'm watching this jabroni pull out a CD and put it in his player and I say to myself, "Self, can someone please tell this silly looking man that 2004 called and it would be nice if he would join us!" The point is, I'm sitting there sipping a mimosa with my iPod that has over 40 CDs downloaded on it! That was the last time I sat next to Michael Cole on a flight.

*For The Record:* John "Big" Gaburick insisted that I mention the Dell Digital Jukebox as opposed to the iPod. He says that the Dell is smaller, has a better battery, and, most importantly, is cheaper. By the way, Big used to be roommates with Cole, for what it's worth.

### No. 2: TiVo

This is a lovely little doodad! I am wondering how the hell I watched regular TV before I purchased TiVo. Speaking of TV, one time Cole invited us to his two-bedroom apartment in Newark, New Jersey for dinner with his family (which turned out to be cheese,

crackers and apple juice). At one point, Cole says, "Let's watch TV, Tazz!" So I don't know what to say to this sorry S.O.B. that wants to watch *Seinfeld* reruns, because not only does he not have TiVo, he also doesn't have Dish Network or DirectTV. Not only does he not have digital cable, check this out: Cole doesn't even have BASIC CABLE! He has this little box on top of his TV with a dial that controls the antenna on the roof of his apartment.

For the third one, I'll turn things over temporarily to my "broadcast colleague."

### No. 3: Xbox

Hi, this is Josh Mathews! I am so happy to have the privilege to be invited to Tazz's compound. You guys wouldn't believe this place! I just saw Tazz beat up a grizzly bear while he rode a skateboard and had a meeting with Mr. McMahon about changing the name of WWE to TWE (Tazz's Wrestling Entertainment). And Mr. McMahon was agreeing with Tazz!

Nobody knows technology like my man Tazz. In his garage alone, next to his five Hummers (Why does Tazz need five Hummers? He just does!), Tazz has a wall that is filled with computer modems! If Tazz sees a compact disc in the locker room, he just throws it away and tells the owner of the CD to get bent!

So with that in mind, here is my take



on the fast-paced world of video-game technology, where I can be Michael Vick and go to the Super Bowl, or I can run around a virtual city in *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* doing jobs for the mob.

Whether it's Playstation 2, Xbox, or Nintendo GameCube (Tazz and I have them all), any of these systems are a great way to escape reality. For Cole, that's really a great thing, but then again, Cole still plays with his old joystick and Atari. ■

### Tazz's Top Three Planets

1. Uranus
2. Pluto
3. Venus
- (4.) Earth (Very Overrated)



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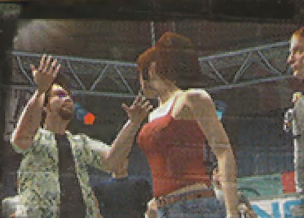
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\*Face mapping technology is exclusive to PlayStation®2 computer entertainment system and requires online connectivity.

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